

The Structural Analysis of Sesotho Folktales: Propp's Approach

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Abstract

This study attempts to show that Vladimir Propp's Morphological Analysis of Russian Folktales has an influence in the way Sesotho folktales are being analysed. Fifteen Sesotho folktales were analysed (but in this paper only two are used as examples) adopting his method and it was observed that both folktales display some of Propp's 31 functions. Although some of these folktales display as much as 16–20 functions, the average of seven functions is observed throughout the analysis in all folktales. This study recommends that the seven average functions that were observed in the analyses should be regarded as basic model in analysing Sesotho folktales, and that every Sesotho folktale should display seven or more functions as stipulated in Propp's analysis. The study concludes by affirming that Propp was influential in the analysis of Sesotho folktales.

Introduction

The Basotho nation, just like other nations, has its own folktales. The folktales are narrated with the purpose of teaching young ones to behave in a manner as expected by their societies. Folktales are mainly told in non-literate and semi-literate societies. These communities are prevalent in rural areas. Folktales are a form of pastime, told after supper. They help to prepare the young ones for bed. It has been noted that "folktales are handed down vertically from generation to generation" (Nyaugwa: 2008).

The folktales that the young tell are usually the tales their parents or grandparents have told them. Folktales have also been noted to move from place to place as they are told by the usually nomadic master storytellers. These master storytellers are usually senior citizens, especially women. However, it must be pointed out that school teachers and media such as radios and televisions have taken over the roles of these master storytellers especially in the more literate and affluent communities.

During performance, the master storytellers use dramatic devices such as gestures, facial expressions, impersonation and mimicry. Normally, folktales are told to children just for fun. Storytellers expect their folktales to be amusing, entertaining and interesting to their audience. At times, the audience includes adults as the researcher has noted. Fortune and Mutasa (1991:12) are in agreement with the idea of adult audiences and state that "the audience is usually a group of people drawn from the

neighbourhood such as a village and its surroundings. It may include people of all ages and the venue will be the house of a gifted storyteller, often a grandmother.”

In addition, Canonici (1993:56) states that “sometimes story telling is preceded by a brief period of riddling...to sharpen the children’s minds”. After this short mental preparation, a folktale performance begins and the audience partakes in the performance. An active audience laughs, comments, asks questions, and joins in the singing or in rhythmic hand clapping during the period of performance.

Folktales are about every day events. Canonici (1993:54) sees the folktale as a mirror of the society in which it is created. He says folktales are constantly adapted to reflect present conditions. Folktales play significant roles in the daily affairs of a particular group of people. They are usually meant to instruct and teach morals. Virtues like bravery, co-operation, obedience, love etc. are dramatised and exemplified while vices such as selfishness, jealousy, cruelty and others are snubbed.

An additional characteristic feature of the Sesotho folktale is a similar/ single structure. All folktales start with an opening formula and end with a closing formula. In between the two formulae lies the body of the folktale, itself comprising the initial action, complication, climax and resolution.

It is against this background that the study attempts to show the influence of Vladimir Propp on the analysis of folktales in general. Not enough work has been done on Sesotho folktales on the basis of Propp's model to establish it firmly as a kind of grammar of the folktale against which artistic competence can be measured. But the possibilities are there.

Theory and background

In his work, *Morphology of the folktale* (1958) the Russian structuralist and folklorist Vladimir Propp seeks to analyse the tale according to its component parts. Dundes (1964:93) says that by morphology of the tale, Propp meant “the description of the folktale according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole.”

Propp divides the tale’s component parts into two categories, namely variables and invariables. Variables are the *dramatis personae* and items in a tale. The invariables (which he calls functions) are the unchanging actions in a tale, for instance the role of trickster. This role can be played by a hare or a lizard in a tale. In summary, Propp (1958:20) says:

The names of the *dramatis personae* change (as well as the attributes of each) but neither actions nor functions change. From this we can draw the inference that a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages. This makes possible the study of the tale according to the function of its *dramatis personae*.

The basic structural unit of Propp's theory is the function. Propp in Wama and Nakatsu (2008), in his Propp identified 31 functions although the functions do not all appear in one tale. Some of the functions are absention, interdiction, violation, consequences. The notion of variables has important consequences for the structure of the folktale. It means that the number of functions in a tale is limited and that the sequence of functions in any tale does not change. Also, these functions remain constant regardless of who performs them. Finally, this means that all folktales have one and the same structure. In a nutshell, exponents of this approach describe the structure or final organisation of the folktale following the chronological order of the linear sequence of its elements. This analysis is termed the syntagmatic structural analysis. This term is borrowed from the notion of syntax in linguistics.

According to Alami (2011:3), 31 functions of *dramatis personae* are distributed among seven spheres of actions corresponding to their respective performers. Spheres of actions mean categories of the characters based on the actions they do in the story. They are: the villain, the donor, the helper, the princess and the father, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero.

The American folklorist Alan Dundes is described by Oosthuizen (1977:20) as "the foremost of Propp's disciples". According to Mota (2009:10), Dundes's theory is regarded as structuralist and syntagmatic. Dundes notes that Propp's theory could also be applied to non-Indo-European folktales. He also notes that Propp had ignored the context in which tales were told and had failed to isolate and specify the contents of his functions.

The theory of Dundes has three main aspects. First, he says that a folktale must be studied in its social and cultural context. He calls the unit of content, the etic unit and that of structure, the emic unit. The terms etic and emic unit were coined from the word phonetic and phonemic. An etic unit is a unit of content while an emic unit is a structural unit in a folktale. It is the emic unit that he termed the motifeme, an equivalent to Propp's function.

The most crucial point to note is that Dundes's motifeme is composed of three modes namely the feature, the distribution and the manifestation mode. The feature mode describes the action of the folktale characters, the manifestation mode defines the elements which fulfil the action and the distribution mode is concerned with the place of the feature mode within the storyline.

Dundes (1965) notes that motifemes cluster to form motifeme sequences; for example, lack - trickery - lack liquidated. Propp also observes that motifemes tend to cluster but notes that they function only as pairs e.g. "lack" coupled with "lack liquidated". Like Propp, Dundes notes these functions, interdiction, violation, trickery, complicity, lack, lack liquidated, difficult task and solution. He, however, changes some of Propp's terminology. Dundes (1965) sees a function pair as a nucleus

motifeme sequence. He further says that motifemic depth is determined by the number of motifemes intervening between the initial situation and the last motifeme. When certain sequences recur in a tale, for example in cyclic tales, then we have sequential depth.

According to Msimang (1986:13), Marivate was “among the first to establish that African tales have a fairly simple plot compared to European ones if motifemic depth is considered i.e. each tale consists of a small number of motifemes.” In a study of Tsonga folktales, Marivate (1973) concludes that despite the lack of motifemic depth the folktales have a tremendous complex plot. This is due to a combination of the simple motifeme sequences to form a number of moves which result in sequential depth. This is clearly the case in cyclic folktales. This feature of sequential depth which is so characteristic of African folktales was first observed by Dundes. This is why a number of scholars applied the Proppian model as modified by Dundes. Similarly, the same model will be used and precisely for the same reason to study Sesotho folktales in this study. This is because many Sesotho folktales have simple plots and a small number of motifemes that give them sequential depth when combined. In this case, this study is going to apply Propp’s theory.

Based on Propp’s finding that the number of functions is restricted, he conjectured that the ordinal succession of functions in each magic folktale is always constant. Figure 1 shows the basic structure of the folktales found and proposed by him.

Table 1: Proposed 31 functions

[Code] Function	
0. [□] Initial situation	16. [H] The hero struggles with villain
1. [β] Absentation	17. [J] Branding or marking the hero
2. [γ] Interdiction	18. [I] Victory over the villain
3. [□] Violation	19. [K] The liquidation of misfortune or lack
4. [□] Reconnaissance	20. [↓] Return of the hero
5. [ζ] Delivery	21. [Pr] Pursuit of the hero
6. [η] Trickery	22. [Rs] Rescue of the hero
7. [θ] Complicity	23. [O] Unrecognised arrival
8. [A] Villainy	24. [L] Claims of a false hero
9. [B] Mediation, the connective incident	25. [M] Difficult task
10.[C] Consent to counteraction	26. [N] Solution of a task
11.[↑] Departure, dispatch of the hero from home	27. [Q] Recognition of the hero
12.[D] The first function of the donor	28. [Ex] Exposure of the false hero
13.[E] Reaction of the hero	29. [T] Transfiguration
14.[F] The acquisition, receipt of a marginal agent	30. [U] Punishment of the false hero or villain
15.[G] Transference to a designated place guidance	31. [W] Wedding

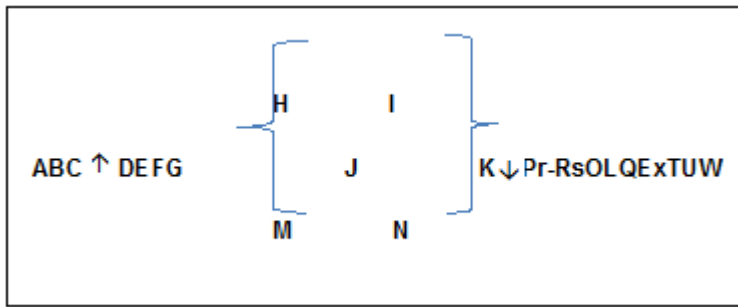


Fig 1: Basic structure

As mentioned earlier, it should be emphasised that Propp himself pointed out that the above rule is perfect for Russian magic folktales but is not generally applicable to narratives, more especially artificially produced tales. In most cases, his idea represents only the characteristics of the Russian magic folktales he analysed. Even though many researchers have tried to apply his idea of constructing a support system for story generation, in most cases the materials they studied involved Russian magic folktales, similar to the work of Propp (Sakuma & Ogata, 2005; Wama & Nakatsu, 2008). From this observation, one can deduce that any attempt to apply his methodology to Sesotho folktales would seem inconsistent. Nevertheless, if it could be shown that his methodology is applicable to Sesotho folktales, this would imply that his idea can be utilised to various arenas, thus facilitating the construction of a system that can automatically generate various types of stories.

Research methodology

A qualitative study was applied for this paper. The researcher himself was the key instrument, meaning that he did everything himself by gathering data from different sources. The researcher took the data as it was and no data was added, cut or manipulated in any form. Ten Sesotho folktales were selected from three popular but different folktale books published in Sesotho: *Diqatjwa Tsa Basotho* (1990); *Ditshomo Tsa Rona* (1986) and *Bokgeleke Ba Basotho* (1993). The steps in the data collection method were reading, classifying, coding and displaying.

Analysis of the story

Sesotho folktales are alive and well (in diverse ways (Moephuli, 1972). Folktales are essentially handed down orally from parent to child or from grandparent to grandchild. The descriptions used in relaying the story, as a matter of course, depend mainly on the specific speakers who try to entertain their audience by telling these stories. This causes slight differences in the same folktale from one locality to another or even from one family to another. In the following sections, analyses are given for “Tselane le Dimo” (Tselane and the cannibal) and “Ntwa ya Diphoofole le Dinonyana” (The battle of birds and the animals) as two examples of Sesotho folktales.

Tselane le Dimo (Tselane and the cannibal)

As is common in most folktales, the preface begins with the “initial situation” [α] “*ba re e ne e re...*”, “*kgale kgale naheng e nngwe...*” (ex. long, long time ago in a certain place...). The environments and scene, including the main characters, become clear, and then the story revolves around these characters. Table 2 shows an analysis of “Tselane le Dimo”. It begins with the “initial situation” and revolves around Tselane, a leading character. She grows up fast and comes to have a determination not to leave her beautiful home because of the monster Dimo. She is determined to risk her life by remaining in the forest. Her obstinance attracted Dimo with his plan to catch and eat her. On the other side, Dimo improvised to get hold of her and at the end he is punished. Finally, Tselane is rescued from the hands of Dimo by her relatives. Figure 2 shows the structure of “Tselane le Dimo” based on the model of Figure 1.

Table 2: Analysis of “Tselane le Dimo”

Text	Function
Long, long time ago in a certain place, there were some parents.	[α] Initial situation
* snip*	
Tselane objected to leave her loved house	[□] Violation
snip	
Dimo imitates her mother to catch her	[ŋ] Trickery and [Pr] Pursuit of the heroin
snip	
Dimo catches Tselane and puts her in a bag	[H] The heroin struggle with the villain
snip	
Dimo visits a certain village with Tselane in the bag and	[Rs] Rescue of the heroin

Tselane is rescued.

snip

Dimo discovers dangerous insects, bees and a dog and gets bitten [U] Punishment of the false hero or villain

snip

Tselane meets her parents and family. [↓] Return of the heroin

α HBC□DEF ħ DEFDEFrsU↓

Fig 2: Structure of “Tselane le Dimo”

Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana (The battle of animals and birds)

Table 3 shows an analysis of “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana” (The battle of animals and birds). It also begins with the “initial situation” and the main character, the perpetrator Phokojwe (jackal) is explained as causing problems in the bird community. He is killing and eating small birds such as doves and chickens. There was a special meeting in which the birds complained about the behaviour of some of the animals towards them. A battle was declared between the animals and the birds. Phokojwe decided not fight and devised a plan to be a referee in order to avoid participating in that battle. He was supposed to stand on top of a hill, wave his tail high to show that the animals are winning or to lower his tail to indicate that birds are winning. Things backfired against him as the birds sent a bee to sting him under his tail so that the tail should be lowered indicating birds victory. Phokojwe became a false hero and a bee a true one.

Table 3: Analysis of “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana”

Text	Function
Long time ago animals and birds lived peacefully without problems.	[α] Initial situation
snip	
Jackal kills doves and other small birds	[A] Villainy
snip	
Jackal comes up with a plan.	[ř] Trickery
snip	
Animals and birds are fighting.	[N] Solution of a task
snip	
A bee stung a jackal under the tail	[U] Punishment of the false hero or villain
snip	
Jackal ran away and animals lost the battle	[Ex] Exposure of the false hero

αBCNβηθABCEx ηθA ηθA ηθA

Fig 3: Structure of “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana”

Findings and discussion

In analysing the 15 Sesotho folktales, it was observed that they all begin with absention (lack) and interdictions followed by violations and the inevitable strings of consequences: reconnaissance (normally by an evil spirit or a witch doctor); *trickery, complicity and villainy*. Usually villainy comes as a punishment for the violation of interdiction. Interdiction is usually violated out of sheer stupidity, greed or curiosity. An interdiction may be the consequence of a contract. Sesotho folktales are full of cases of making and breaking of friendship contracts. For instance, in “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana”, there is an agreement that both animals and birds should respect each other and live peacefully until Phokojwe (jackal) decides to break that contract by eating small birds.

The analysis in both “Tselane and Dimo” (Tselane and the cannibal) and “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana” (The battle between animals and birds) reflected 14 and 16 functions respectively. These functions also differ in order of appearance. In “Tselane and Dimo”, we observed functions: 1–10, 21, 22, 28 and 30; while in “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana” functions 2–11, 16, 18, 19, 25, 28 and 30 were noticed. However, “Morena ya neng a e na le bana ba makgwaba” (The king who had crowns [birds] children); adhered to Propp’s morphology as 29 of 31 functions are observed. The average of seven functions is noticed throughout the analysed Sesotho folktales. They are absention (lack), interdiction, violation, lack liquidation of misfortune, transfiguration (consequences), consent to counteraction (attempt escape) and punishment.

Function, as defined by Propp, represents just the action of the characters. In other words, function itself contains a role of subject or object in a short scene. For example, with the 11th function in Table 1, [↑] departure, the composition of “the hero leaves his home” is predetermined. Also for the 18th function, [I] victory over the villain, the condition that “A works on B” is included in the function. In this case, A is a hero and B is a villain (a hero defeated a villain) or A is a villain and B is a hero (villain is defeated by a hero). From these examples, it seems the reason why the roles of main characters are included in the definition of each function is that the main characters have some kind of symbolism.

The trickery of Dimo (cannibal) in “Tselane le Dimo” and Phokojwe (jackal) in “Ntwa ya diphoofolo le dinonyana” is as emblematic of an adversary that threatens the lives and livelihoods of their communities. Furthermore, it can be assumed that Propp realised the symbolism in the magic folktales he analysed, so he may have hypothesised the concatenation of short plots called “*functions*” as having a role system of subject-object relationships. Throughout the analysis, it was found that this is true in the case of Sesotho folktales. Perhaps by analysing more Sesotho folktales following Propp’s methodology, an observation that can elucidate certain regularities when dealing with Sesotho folktales may be formulated.

In some tested cases, it can be observed that the functions are not only the basic building blocks of the tales but that they do appear in logical, often natural and predictable patterns. But with Sesotho folktales of historical tale type, including myth, legend and various forms of factual accounts defy consistent analysis in terms of the Proppian model, although they do occasionally make use of some of its morphological elements.

On the issue of spheres of actions (i.e. the role of character play in the folktale); the analysed Sesotho folktales revealed the following characters: the villain (Dimo in “Tselane le Dimo”), the donor (Ngaka in “Morena ya neng a e na le bana ba makgwaba”), the helper (Notshi in “Ntwa ya diphoofole le dinonyana”), the hero (Notshi in “Ntwa ya diphoofole le dinonyana”) and the false hero (Phokojwe and Dimo). In “Kgosatsana e neng e sa batle ho nyalwa” (The princess who did not want to marry), the characters included are the princess and her father, the king.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this study, Propp’s methodology was described in approaching Sesotho folktales. Many hurdles were predicted in trying to analyse Sesotho folktales rather than Russian ones as he analysed. However, 15 Sesotho folktales were successfully analysed using 31 functions defined by Propp (but in this paper only two folktales were used as examples in the analysis). Learning that Sesotho folktales comply with an average of seven functions of Propp’s function theory, it might be imperative that when analysing Sesotho folktales those identified functions should be observed. The implication will be that each Sesotho folktale will have the basic function number: 1, 2, 3, 10, 13, 29 and 30 the least. This does not imply that we may also encounter more than seven benchmarked Propp’s functions.

Indeed, there is no doubt that the Proppian model can provide a telescopic window on traditional life and history of any community to whose tales it is successfully applied.

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From White Beads to White Words: Symbols and Language in the Marketing of Xhosa Traditional Healers¹

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Abstract

Much research has been conducted on African traditional healers generally (Arden 1996; Chidester 1996; Chakanza 2006; Reeder 2011), and Xhosa diviners and herbalists specifically (Hammond-Tooke 1989; Hirst 1997, 2005), but none of this work focuses on their particular public discourse. Some researchers (Tyrrell 1976; Broster & Bourn 1982) describe outward symbols and publicly knowable signs of their identity, but do not analyse the implicit meanings of these symbols. In order to reach a more nuanced understanding of how Xhosa diviners and herbalists traditionally used to market themselves to their public (how they made themselves publically known), this paper draws on information from documented investigations into diviners and herbalists in South Africa; a description of their current marketing strategies is drawn from our own research and inquiries. We argue that Xhosa herbalists and diviners are key players in negotiating the socio-cultural aspects of their respective societies, and changes in the way they communicate their services highlight a shift in the South African linguistic and symbolic landscape. Diviners and healers now use current key symbols (including English and Western symbols) with a concurrent loss of Xhosa cultural expressions and symbols, which are only retained to reference non-secular (i.e. spiritual) or organic (i.e. natural) forms of healing.

Research questions

- How did Xhosa herbalists and diviners advertise and market themselves traditionally?
- How do contemporary herbalists and diviners market themselves? What languages and symbols do they use?

Introduction

In South Africa practitioners of conventional medicine do not actively market themselves. Regulations permit them to advertise, but only according to strict ethical rules (HPCSA 2001). Textually, they are limited: the advertising template allows no more than name, licence number, qualification, field of specialisation and contact details. They do, however, have access to a set of symbols that index their professionalism: the red medical cross, white coats, brass plaques and medical implements. In the same way, Xhosa traditional healers did not formerly use any form of

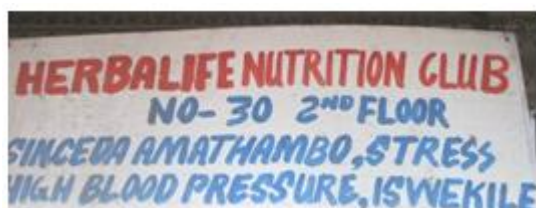
¹ For ease of reading we will refer to *amagqirha* and *izanuse* as diviners and *amaxhwele* as herbalists.

marketing or advertising to make the public aware of their services, but relied on a complex system of signs, symbols and discourses to identify themselves as diviners or herbalists.²

What was lacking in traditional healer discourse was professional recognition, which until the onset of colonialism would not have mattered as a healer's skills and powers of divination would have created sufficient word-of-mouth marketing. Once their services came to be viewed in terms of Western allopathic medicine, however, the lack of legal status would have constrained traditional healers' freedom to advertise themselves publicly, and it was not until the late 1800s (Flint 2001) that herbalists (but not diviners) were granted licence by the colonial government to practice, and this did not include permission for any kind of publicity. Since then global efforts to recognise traditional healers include the 1978 International Conference on Primary Health Care at Ama Ata, where the World Health Assembly recommended that governments include traditional healers in the "health care team" (DoH et al: 1). In South Africa the Traditional Health Practitioners Act of 2007 (Act 22 of 2007) recognised traditional healers as legal and an Interim Traditional Health Practitioners Council was eventually established on 12 February 2013 (Ramokgopa 2013).

Obtaining legal status has allowed some contemporary healers access to a Western medical marketing discourse in which professionalism is promoted textually, whereas previously their vocation and skills could only be known through their rituals and healing capabilities. What is important is that we focus on the implicit meanings in historical records of traditional healers' marketing discourses and use them to try gain an understanding of how the publicity has changed in contemporary contexts.

For example, in a small sample of contemporary advertisements and signboards³, those in Xhosa – generally handwritten – claim or suggest a general healing of all ailments (see Figures 1 and 2), while those indexing professionalism are in English (see Figure 3).



Translation of Xhosa: We help bones, stress, high blood pressure, sugar (diabetes).

² Flint argues that there is a blurring of the line between the work of a diviner and that of a herbalist: "While it is generally the *isangoma* who divines and the *inyanga* who dispenses herbs, both are known to do a bit of each today." (Flint 2001:203)

³ All signboards depicted in this article were on public display, and permission to photograph them was obtained from the business owners. The pamphlets reproduced were public documents explicitly intended for free distribution. Permission to photograph signs and symbols on clothing was also sought and granted.

Fig 1: Signboard in Dutywa, Eastern Cape



Translation of Xhosa: Healer from Zwazini – Dr Dlamini – he lives in the village of Ciko. He examines.

Fig 2: Signboard in Willowvale, Eastern Cape

The English branding (Herbalife Nutrition Club) and code-switching in Figure 1 index the practitioner's knowledge of Western medical discourse (nutrition, stress, high blood pressure) but also an understanding of traditional ways of talking about osteoporosis (*sinceda amathambo* = We help bones) and diabetes (*iswekile* = sugar) that would resonate with older people and allow the healer to have an immediate relationship with a Xhosa speaking clientele. In Figure 2 the entire advertisement is rendered in Xhosa – the *inyanga* (medicine man) merely states where he lives (a village) and that he “examines”. The advertiser here is using Xhosa as a code for traditionalism, particularly with the use of such lexical items as *ilali* (village) and *inyanga*. (*The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa* glosses *inyanga* as a “person who treats people afflicted with illness, e.g. physician, doctor, herbalist, medicine man” (Mini et al 2003: 858).) Also, by merely stating, in Xhosa, that “*uyaxilonga*” (he examines), he is suggesting that his procedures will be traditional, although there is a hint at Western professionalism in that the verb *ukuxilonga* is now also used when referring to a general medical examination at a hospital. This healer could possibly be suggesting that an orthodox physical examination is performed rather than just divination and prophecy.

In Figure 3, the sign clearly advertises a Western-trained doctor (note the symbol of the red cross) with the English word “surgery” referencing a certain professionalism that can only be linked to a doctor trained at a university.



Translation of Xhosa: *Ugqirha* = doctor

Fig 3: Doctor's surgery in Willowvale, Eastern Cape

This chapter focuses on the reason why some Xhosa healers and herbalists have discarded certain cultural codes and symbols in favour of others and what this tells us about the changing value of indigenous languages in the domain of traditional health practices. In order to do this, we need to answer our key research questions.

Research question 1: How did Xhosa herbalists and diviners advertise and market themselves traditionally?

Community Involvement

African healers have always been known to their public, not through direct marketing or advertising, but through an integral part of a cultural community and through their work in keeping the balance of that community healthy:

The earliest written records in South Eastern Africa show that healers maintained a complex system of “public health” that was reflected in African architecture, community planning and a strict adherence to rituals and avoidance taboos (Flint 2001:202).

The public would, therefore, not only consult diviners privately, but also be able to identify and know them by their public training and their healing rituals.

Diviners were frequently called upon to draw upon past events to explain current issues (Arden 1996) and were a key part of society with a deep knowledge of cultural and social practices and a remarkable facility for linking the physical and metaphysical realms.

Public Training, Ritual Performances

Xhosa diviners follow a calling (*ukuthwasa*), which is characterised by a particular behaviour and the performance of specific, publicly viewable rituals (Hirst 2005). Munk (in Richter 2003: 9) observes that “a ritual of divination, in which all diagnosis takes place, is a highly dramatic event”, and we

would argue that this drama is an essential ingredient in the marketing and advertising of the diviner, although both of these terms relating to publicity seeking might seem anachronistic in that context.

Ortner (1973: 1338) claims that every culture has certain key elements “which are crucial to its distinctive organization”, and we argue that dramatic rituals acted as advertisements that allowed the public to identify people’s cultural roles. Writing about traditional Xhosa healers, Hirst (1997) refers to the river, nakedness and the colour white as all being central symbols of the diviner:

Diviners are apt to draw on liminal signs – such as nakedness, the river, the colour white and so on – transforming them in the process into symbols of transition signifying the change of status involved in becoming a diviner. Immersion in and emergence from the river symbolises the transition in status from novice to practitioner. (Hirst 1997:220)

Mythology, Beliefs and Royal Patronage

The mythology of Xhosa diviners and herbalists includes the popular beliefs and suppositions that developed around them, both in the Xhosa communities they served and among outsiders who came into contact with them. Publicly disseminated folklore surrounding healers is complex and operates on multiple levels: Broster and Bourn (1982:15) assert that diviners serve a threefold function by incorporating religion, magic and medicine into their practice. Diviners are trained to navigate the symbolic as well as the social, and their rituals market their familiarity (a key concept in marketing⁴) with their clients’ past and present, aided by a sophisticated knowledge of how language can manipulate people. They are constantly called upon to interpret and negotiate situations – and their capacity to do this is what sets them apart and advertises them as skilled professionals.

Reading the bones (which can be seen as a symbol of the diviners’ profession and a part of their marketing repertoire) calls for an understanding of how different elements work together (e.g. how a particular stone, such as a red jasper, falls in relation to other objects in the bone collection) (Reeder 2011:25). This knowledge of bone throwing was openly demonstrated to the healer’s clients while in consultation with them, and therefore carried with it a symbolic weight: it advertised the therapist as having a specific, arcane knowledge that would hold value and significance for the person who had paid for the consultation. The fact that diviners and herbalists utilised a holistic approach, which acted as a bridge between the different spheres of people’s lives and included the ancestors in the realm of the living (Chakanza 2006), is a further demonstration of their status as highly qualified individuals.

⁴ Ngwenya (2011: 3) speaks of how people gravitate towards their own kind “they like to buy from those with whom they feel a similarity or kinship”.

Historically, outsiders' mythologising of Xhosa diviners and healers relied heavily on their "otherness", utilising an entirely Western frame of reference:

Healers or "witchdoctors", as they were called, represented for the European and American imagination all that was "tribal", "superstitious", and "primitive" in Africa. These images, which occasionally resurface in today's popular culture and helped Europe justify rhetorically the colonizing of "savage" peoples, emerged largely as the result of European missionaries' and doctors' descriptions of African healers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Flint 2001:200)

Mostert (1992:206) makes reference to two historical records in which Xhosa diviners are mentioned in terms of their influence in high-up circles. One is in the writings of J. Fitzgerald, a British medical doctor working among the Xhosa in the mid-19th century. He wrote that the Xhosa were a "doctor-loving people. Their doctors and prophets form part of the machinery of their government ... the doctor is a man of immense influence patronised and supported as he is by the chief." The other record is by James Read, a missionary who observed that Xhosa doctors "are the lawyers and bishops of the country, and they would consider a council as imperfect as an English parliament has been considered without such persons".

Thus not only the mythology and beliefs of the Xhosa, but also their system of government, served to underscore and market to the general populace (including non-Xhosa speakers) the importance and status of healers in that society.

Language, Music and Dance, Clothes and Adornments

Diviners were advertised by their language (Hirst 1997), their music and dance (Hunter 1964; Hansen 1981; Stinson 1998) and their clothes and adornments (Hirst 1997; Mlisa 2009):

Xhosa diviners were particularly sensitive to the power of language and a measure of skill as a healer was the ability to use a non-secular language firmly rooted in the world of ancestors, dreams and divination. This special diviner language is often used in conjunction with ritual singing and dancing which requires an audience (Levine 2005: 95–96).

This non-secular language conveyed by singing and dancing is a way of advertising metaphysical powers and of having a "calling". The healer can market him/herself purely by speaking and singing in a particular way, using a jargon that is associated with a powerfully arcane knowledge. It is interesting to note that such non-secular language can even be used by contemporary pop artists to market and advertise themselves as having sourced their creative inspiration from a metaphysical world. This is well exemplified in the contemporary Afro-soul artist Camagwini (whose lyrics and public utterances index her as healer):

Ndingumqambi waqanjwayo

Ndilingqina lamagqirha

Ndinenkenqe, andizenzanga

I am a creator who has been created

I am the witness of the traditional doctors

I have a calling, I haven't done it for myself (Dowling & Stinson 2011:183)

Tyrrell's (1976) illustrations present diviners in red blankets, different blankets denoting graduation from different schools of training, in much the same way that universities today identify graduates with specific hoods and gowns. The colour of beads and the way in which they are worn also contain meaning: for example, the diviners' white beads are used for protection against evil spirits as they keep the spirit light and alert (Tyrrell 1976). White clay on the body and white aprons were also used by diviners to advertise their profession (Hirst 1997), as were inflated bladders, snakeskin and bird feathers (Tyrrell 1976).

Protecting Rituals and Medicines

Like diviners, Xhosa herbalists were known largely by their symbolic accoutrements of animal skins, as well as by the success of their rituals aimed at ensuring a household's protection from evil and harm. Van Heyningen (2004:171) notes that herbalists gained fame "as 'lightning doctors', cleansing families and their possessions after a lightning strike". What is important here is that the marketing and advertising were achieved by the performance of certain rituals (e.g. cleansing after lightning) that were aimed at making the community or family feel strengthened against future disasters.

Herbalists, thus, functioned in a similar way to insurance companies, in that they could increase their client base after a calamity because, like businesses offering cover, they played on the fact that people felt impotent in the face of disaster and employing their services and products helped a family feel protected and secure.

It can, therefore, be argued that apart from the performance of certain rituals, herbalists were primarily known for their medicines (Hammand-Tooke 1989:114) and for their deep understanding of roots and plants. Hirst (2005) points out, however, that the strength of medicines does not rely purely on the herbalist – family traditions are important in ensuring the efficacy of medicines and the protection and well-being of the household:

Neglected ancestors thus increase the power of one's rivals' or enemies' medicines. Once the ancestors have been supplicated and appeased (*ukungxengxezela*, and *ukucamagusha*), however, their protection ensures the efficacy of the healer's medicines. (Hirst 2005:3)

Part of the herbalist's and the diviner's success in marketing themselves thus relied on their knowledge of families and family traditions, clans and clan names: they had to demonstrate an

understanding the importance of ancestors in Xhosa culture in order to effectively market their skills and medicines (Hirst 2005).

Xhosa herbalists and diviners would have also benefited from the general public's growing interest in, and awareness of, herbal remedies and cures. Thus while early Xhosa herbalists did not use any advertisements or public announcements, the proliferation of advertisements for herbal remedies in newspapers indicates that such preparations were extremely popular in the early 20th century, particularly by mail order (Digby 2005:450).

Research question 2: How do contemporary herbalists and diviners market themselves? What languages and symbols do they use?

A Shift in Advertising Methods: Below-The-Line And Above-The Line Advertising

It is a given that migration from rural to urban areas in South Africa has led to a level of cultural and linguistic diversity for which South Africa has become well known. This diversity has not gone unnoticed by traditional healers who have adapted their marketing and advertising strategies accordingly. They are no longer operating in an isolated environment but have to contend with multiple healing systems, different languages and a highly competitive social environment. There has been a shift in the distribution of their target audience, requiring a shift in the way they advertise and market themselves.

Ngwenya (2011:3) explains that advertisements fall into two distinct categories: above the line (ATL) and below the line (BTL). ATL advertisements are aimed at large audiences, whereas BTL advertisements are far more specific because they target particular consumer requirements. ATL advertisements appear in large-scale media such as television and the national press, frequently representing major brands. BTL advertisements often take the form of pamphlets, posters and even T-shirts, and they generally set out to connect with a pre-identified target audience through the use of familiar signs and symbols (Ngwenya 2011).

Although using the modern marketing terms ATL and BTL in the context of diviners and herbalists might seem incongruous, it speaks to the shift in diviner/herbalist-audience relationships. We can argue that healers previously used ATL advertising because the cultural and linguistic landscapes to which they were confined made *all* audiences in their domain a legitimate target market. In other words, the homogeneous linguistic environments that the political systems restricted them to rendered the pre-identification of a specific group as a target audience redundant and, as a result, BTL advertising was not necessary.

Historically, Xhosa diviners and herbalists worked within a specific geographical, cultural and linguistic context in the part of South Africa that now constitutes the Eastern Cape province. Here, in the apartheid-designated Xhosa “homelands” of the Transkei and Ciskei, their audiences were largely homogeneous and monolingual (Xhosa). In this setting, the mass audience was able to relate to the signs and symbols used by Xhosa diviners and herbalists, even though those messages were not carried by print and broadcast media, but rather in public forums to which everyone was exposed, and in which no member of society could escape explicit marketing in the form of rituals, dancing and song, and symbolic accessories. This was, therefore, ATL advertising because it related to the community en masse and because everyone had unrestricted access to the messages that were being relayed.

Xhosa speakers were thus easily able to contextualise diviners and herbalists within their worldviews. Healers and their systems of healing were applicable to the mass audience because they formed such an integral part of society on multiple levels (Broster & Bourn 1982:15). Just as children can recognise major brand logos on billboards today, people were able to understand and identify the signs and symbols displayed by the diviners and herbalists. Tyrrell’s (1976) illustrations present diviners in red blankets, and she notes that different blankets denote graduation from different schools of training. These explicit signs of promotion from one level of education to the next operated in much the same way as hoods and gowns in present-day university hierarchies – the only difference being that the red blankets were more ubiquitous than academic hoods and gowns, which are only worn in an academic context. Beads were also highly significant in that their colour and the way in which they were worn conveyed meaning (Broster & Bourn 1982) to the general populace.

Although beads and accessories still identify healers today, communities are less familiar with their specific meanings. This has transpired because of shifts in South Africa’s socio-cultural landscape. Previously a young woman would have sent her beloved a beaded love letter, but now she sends a text message from her mobile phone! Shifts in South African social dynamics mean that symbols which were once key (Ortner 1973) are no longer regarded as such. This has resulted in the signs and symbols of the diviners and herbalists moving from an ATL position, where the general populace was able to identify and relate to them, to a BTL position. These traditional healers have given their advertising a BTL focus, because they have had to reposition it to target specific groups likely to seek their services. They can no longer rely on a homogeneous, monolingual (Xhosa) potential clientele, but need to operate in multilingual communities and compete with a large number of different medical messages emanating from pharmacies, hospitals and clinics, as well as from other therapists and alternative health practitioners such as masseurs and homeopaths.

Alexander (2001) suggests that South Africa can be viewed as a river into which flow tributaries of language, religion and culture from other catchment areas. Ngwenya (2011:4) further explains that identity operates on three levels: ethnicity at the core, situated within a national identity, which in turn is located within a global discourse. This is consonant with the river metaphor, which has different catchment areas contributing to different “streams” of identity and eventually contributing to one larger entity (Alexander 2001). In contemporary South Africa, traditional Xhosa healers are just one sub-group of a large group of black South Africans (also including Zulu, Sotho, Tswana and Venda) that have diverse ways of interpreting illness and of communicating healing interventions. These groups, although distinct, also have a common national identity as South African healers and a global identity as health care workers.

The Introduction of Licences as a Symbol of Western Propriety

Xhosa herbalists and diviners were not always viewed as distinct; it was the colonial authority’s introduction of licences for herbalists in the late 1800s (diviners were not granted licences) that encouraged herbalists to distance themselves from diviners. Writing about the historical situation in KwaZulu-Natal, Flint (2001:205) discusses the root of the redefinition:

Healers hoping to acquire government licences and avoid legal prosecution began to adopt these terms and redefine themselves in relation to other types of healer. *Isangoma* – healers who used clairvoyant powers – often tried to pass as government-defined *inyanga*.

As discussed earlier, certification is linked to legality and professionalism. While traditional healers have important cultural symbols to legitimise themselves in the eyes of their audiences, Western societies require certification for professionals. Once a healer migrates out of a monolingual, culturally homogenous area into a multilingual, culturally diverse one in which medical centres such as doctors’ surgeries, hospitals and clinics are more profuse, the need for certification becomes greater. A certificate contains an issuer and a subject. It is a “signed instrument that empowers the subject”. The origin of this authority is the issuer (Ellison et al 1999:4). In the case of traditional healers in present-day South Africa, the issuer is the Traditional Healers Organization (Figure 4). The fact that the healer has obtained authority from an organisation which observes Western paradigms of legitimisation allows the healer to index authority within a national discourse. On a national level recognition of major life events (birth, marriage, death) and achievements (educational levels, driver’s licenses, skills obtained) is obtained through documentation.

The certificate in Figure 4 uses the term “Traditional Health Promoter” and also features an emblem clearly designed to resemble a coat of arms, which is a “heraldic device dating to the 12th century in Europe” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and thus relates to Western systems of power and authority. This emblem appears on the clothing (Figure 5) issued by the organisation, as does bold English text. All

of this works to locate the healer on a national level. The change in clothing and the addition of certification allow the healer to negotiate an identity bolstered by national paradigms of legitimacy. This facilitates a distancing from the notion of witchcraft and backward practices, many previously associated with the profession (Flint 2001).



Fig 4: Traditional Health Promoter's License

To index authority and validity, healers have relocated part of their advertising to encompass the national discourse. The certification contains an alternative title, in English, for the healer (Traditional Health Promoter). To use any lexical item from an African language (*igqirha*, *inyanga*, *isangoma*, *ixhwele*) would, in this environment, detract from the purpose of the certificate – that being to create Western legitimacy – so English as opposed to an indigenous African language is used throughout. While the use of an indigenous African language may convey a depth of cultural knowledge and skill (Okpewho 1979), professionally the use of English relates the occupation to an international medical discourse, and lends it status and authority.

The adoption of English and certification demonstrates the ability of contemporary African healers to include Western symbols within their marketing discourse. Healers are sensitive to language and symbols, because their profession constantly requires them to interpret and communicate meaning – so in their own practice they are able to manipulate and integrate new languages, new codes. The shift in healers' audiences from a predominantly monolingual “catchment area” to a multilingual national “river” is illustrated in the use of a language (including symbols) associated with this arena. In other words, certificates and English relate to the wider national discourse, while the use of indigenous languages reinforces core ethnic values that feed into this discourse.

Clothes

In the course of our investigation we visited Masiphumelele, a township outside the suburban area of Fish Hoek, on the coast near Cape Town. Although the municipal ward into which Masiphumelele falls (Ward 69) includes a number of predominantly white suburbs, the percentage of black Africans residing there is nevertheless large (41%) (Dowling 2011:354). The township boasts a health centre/clinic, and the nearest hospital is in Fish Hoek, only 4.6km away. The existence of these medical centres is important because they provide a range of systems of healing and facilitate medical pluralism in and around the township. This means that despite the location's linguistic landscape (91% of Masiphumelele inhabitants are Xhosa speaking⁵), it is nevertheless no longer isolated, but is mediated and influenced by factors such as urbanisation and linguistic and cultural shifts.⁶

We were granted permission to speak to a prophet, a professional healer and a novice healer at the Masiphumelele home of the professional healer. Looking at their clothes we noticed both traditional and Western advertising of the profession, with one practitioner clad in the Western-style uniform of a formally recognised healer's organisation, while the other wore white face paint and beadwork indexing her liminal state in the process of becoming a traditional healer. The prophet, a young man, also worked for a security company: he held a large pastoral staff while wearing a blue jacket imprinted with the name of his employer, National Professional Security. Even though not referring to his credentials as a prophet, the word "professional" on his clothing identified him as someone who had been recognised by an organisation that pronounced its legitimacy through text on clothes – in much the same way as the healer's outfit did (see Figure 5).

We were told by Masiphumelele residents that the more highly regarded healer was the one with the Western certification and clothing, while the trainee healer, certified only by traditionally recognised symbols, was considered less proficient. Once she completed her training, she would assume full authority as a healer by donning the red gown and being awarded formal certification.

Beadwork and face paint still advertise to a specific Xhosa-speaking audience able to decode their implicit meanings. The use of such traditional emblems indicates a deeply ingrained cultural heritage and knowledge, which would appeal to groups that still have ties to traditional identities and belief systems.

⁵ <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Masiphumelele.htm>

⁶ Linguistically there is code-switching and lexical borrowing (Dowling 2011), and culturally residents have adopted Western approaches to healing and belief systems.



Fig 5: Red gown and beret of Traditional Healers Organization

The appearance of text on gowns (Figure 5) demonstrates the healer's sensitivity to the power of language (Hirst 2005). The English motto "Unity is strength" suggests that people should come together, and implicit in this is the belief that different healing systems should unite and benefit from one another. The fact that "Unity is strength" (*Ex unitate vires*) was the official motto of the Union and Republic of South Africa from 1910 to 2000 has apparently not been considered by the organisation – but it seems somewhat anomalous that a motto with strong apartheid resonance has now been adopted by an African organisation post 2000. Probably those who adopted this motto had no notion of its political associations. There are many sayings, proverbs and idiomatic expressions in indigenous African languages that could have been used (e.g. the Xhosa *iMbumba yaManyama*, which has the same meaning as "unity is strength"), but they are not employed because a wider audience is being targeted, and clearly this audience is young enough not to make any negative associations. The phrase "for Africa" is an attempt at Africanising what is otherwise a very Western set of clothing and symbols.

The power of text over orality is emphasised and highlighted with the use of titles such as 'Traditional Health Promoter' (Figure 4), employed by traditional healers as a way to negotiate their identity away from those of shaman and witchdoctor under which they had previously laboured (Tyrrell 1976:124). These terms often had primitive, backward and unwholesome connotations (Flint 2001:200). The Western academic-style gown (Figure 5) with its English text and motto, and the possession of an official certificate (Figure 4) also in English, demonstrate a competency not only in a global language, but also in the symbols usually employed by speakers of that language. In this context, the healers display a knowledge of current key symbols in South Africa as well as an ability to manipulate and negotiate them.



Fig 6: *Thokozani bogogo nabomkhulu* (Rejoice grandmothers and grandfathers) (Traditional Healers Organization, n.d.)

This use of symbols extends to realms such as the internet, where websites such as that of the Traditional Healers Organization (n.d.) reference a Western form of professionalism through the predominant use of English (Figure 6). Western medical discourse is also alluded to, in the form of a code of ethics reminiscent of the Hippocratic Oath. Qualifications are listed in English, while in background images the more traditional elements of the Xhosa healer's locale such as beads and huts are subtly indexed, in order to lend an air of cultural gravitas. This is also demonstrated in the use of the Zulu expression *thokozani bogogo nabomkhulu*, which literally means: "rejoice grandmothers and grandfathers" and is used when diviners greet each other or speak to their ancestors. *Thokoza* can also mean to "enjoy good health". The English motto "unity is strength" on this website, in its central position under the organisation logo, works here in the same way as it does on the gown (Figure 5): it functions as ATL advertising, targeting a broad, multilingual audience.

Idiomatic expressions indicate a level of maturity and linguistic competence (Okpewho 1979), and the salutation "*thokozani bogogo nabomkhulu*", like the beads and the picture of the rural scene on the website, is an implicit symbol, since you would have to understand traditional healers' greeting conventions to grasp its significance. The use of English and Western-style imagery is overt, with English used for practical matters; but there is also a degree of implicit symbolism in the use of English, in that it indexes allegiance to Western norms and has high status compared to indigenous African languages (Deumert 2010).

The website features a downloadable code of ethics, a list of traditional healers by area and membership application forms. There is a gallery with photographs of healers dancing in their traditional white vestments, but it also has pictures of older healers in red gowns. The gallery demonstrates the valorisation of traditional symbols and images: there are pictures showing the interiors of healers' houses and young trainee healers in semi-traditional garb dancing at Western-style conferences. There is even a photograph of healers in traditional clothes covered by their red capes protesting outside parliament in support of a government health minister who had been condemned for suggesting HIV/Aids sufferers could improve their health by good nutrition alone and that antiretrovirals were poisonous. (Their signs, in English and Zulu, say: Stop poisoning our people: *Yekani ukutyhefa abantu bethu.*).

A number of South African websites, including those of the City of Johannesburg and South African Tourism, promote South Africa as a tourist destination by suggesting that to get the full African experience one needs to visit traditional medicine markets (City of Johannesburg, n.d.; South African Tourism, n.d.). This advertising copy can be compared to early missionary descriptions of healers (Flint 2001) in which the arcane and mystic are foregrounded while actual healing practices are not mentioned. The website designers and copywriters concentrate on concrete symbols such as skins, beads and healing potions in jars. Indigenous African languages are placed on a secondary level: for instance, the Nguni name "*Ezinyangeni*" (Place of Healers) is provided only after the English description of the place as a "muti market" – and yet it is the only reference to healing. The English focuses on the fact that it is a market place and uses the word "muti", which originates from the Zulu word for "tree" and is used here in an implicitly derogatory way to refer to the medicines of witches.

Symbols Outside Shops and Pamphlets

Contemporary herbalists are identified not so much by the clothes they wear but by the way they decorate the places where they dispense their medicines. Lona Qubathi, a resident of Capricorn Park in Cape Town, originally comes from Hobeni, a village in Elliotdale in the Eastern Cape province, told me:

Uye ngamanye amaxesha ufike konekwe izikhumba zezilwanyana zasendle – umzekelo, inyoka, ingwe nezinye endingazaziyo kuba zezantoni.

Sometimes you arrive and the skins of wild animals are hung up – for example, a snake, tiger or others that I don't know what they are.

The signs shown in Figures 7 and 8 were photographed in 2005 outside a herbalist's shop in Langa, Cape Town's oldest township.



Fig 7: Signboard outside herbalist's shop in Langa, Cape Town



Fig 8: Signboard with healer's name outside herbalist shop in Langa, Cape Town

The sign in Figure 7 reads: ‘We follow the Pondo, bewitcher/magician. They blocked themselves from the old one thinking it is a calf,’ figuratively referring to the fact that people sometimes underestimate the enormity of their problems assuming they are something small (*ithole* = calf). The baboon in the picture is significant because baboons were thought to be witches’ familiars. Interestingly the English word “chemist” is used (although incorrectly spelled), which suggests that this particular herbalist would like to be identified with Western notions of pharmacy and therefore, uses the language most associated with these professionals.

The wording of the sign in Figure 8, outside the same shop, uses the same expression with a slight variation: instead of *zazixina* (they were blocking), they use *zazileqa* (they were chasing). The sign gives the herbalist’s name, Ntlane Gilimikhuba, and around it the text, *vula kuvaliwe herbarlist zazileqa endala zicinga ukuba lithole*, which translates as: ‘Open-what-is-closed herbalist, they were chasing the old one thinking that it was a calf.’ Once again, an English word (again incorrectly spelt), “herbalist”, is used instead of the Xhosa *ixhwele*, highlighting the status of the profession by using Western terminology.

The language in these signs indexes various kinds of knowledge. The word *mthakathi* in Figure 7 can refer to a witch or wizard, but because it is in the vocative without its initial vowel it is probably intended here as a clan name used as a form of address – thus signalling to the public that the sign

writer is familiar with Xhosa agnatic lines. As discussed earlier, knowledge of the importance of clan names and ancestors is critical if healing is to take place effectively. It is also significant that young boys in the township can also address each other as *mtshakathi* (charmer), so the advertiser might be exploiting the semantic field of the word “*umthakathi*” creatively to refer to a clan name, sorcery and also a charming person.

The signs in Figures 7 and 8 were photographed in 2005. We have not been able to find any similar signs, even after investigating a number of different townships and towns in South Africa. Ubiquitous, however, are pamphlets (e.g. Figures 9a, 9b and 9c, distributed in the city centre of Cape Town) and signs (e.g. Figure 10, photographed in September 2012 in Diepsloot, Johannesburg) that list in the indigenous language (or languages) of the area all the ills that the advertiser claims to be able to cure.

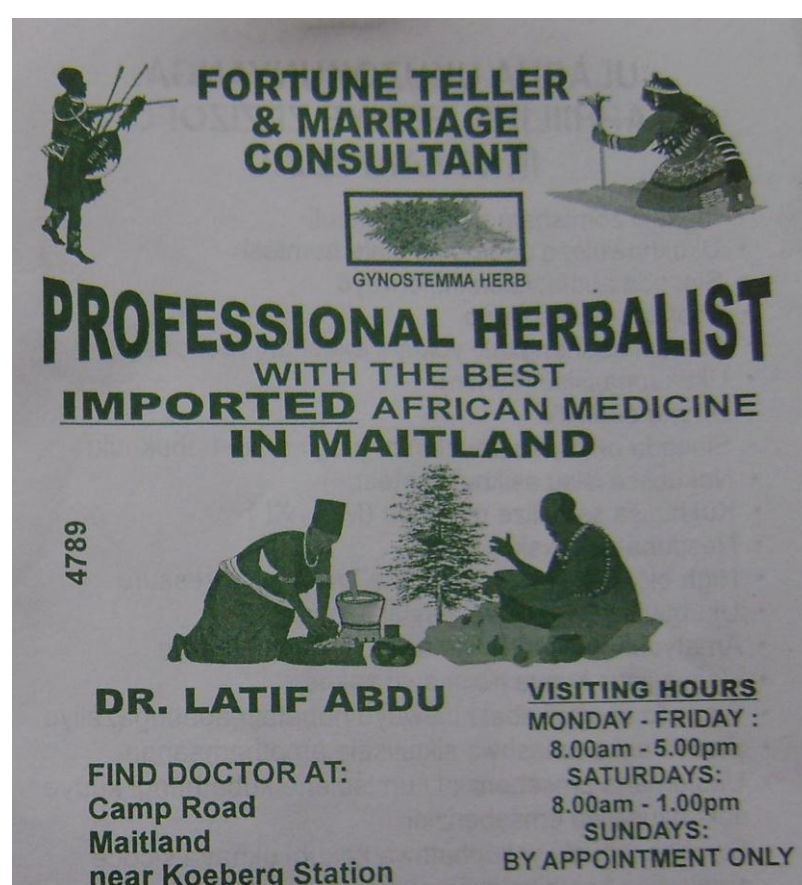


Fig 9a: Pamphlet cover: Fortune teller and marriage consultant

Although, judging by his name, the herbalist advertised in the bi-fold pamphlet (Figures 9a, 9b and 9c) is not Xhosa, he does use and exploit symbols associated with Xhosa healers, and that is important in terms of this study. The front has certain key words in bold capital letters, most prominently “professional herbalist”, and the word “imported” is even underlined to highlight its importance. The pictures index traditional African healers while the visiting hours and the title “Dr” suggest a Western

mode of medical discourse. The practitioner's Arabic name and the reference to "imported African medicine" initially suggest that a South African audience is being targeted from elsewhere on the continent. This is notwithstanding the fact that an entire inside panel of the pamphlet is in Xhosa, albeit very poor Xhosa, riddled with egregious spelling and orthography errors.

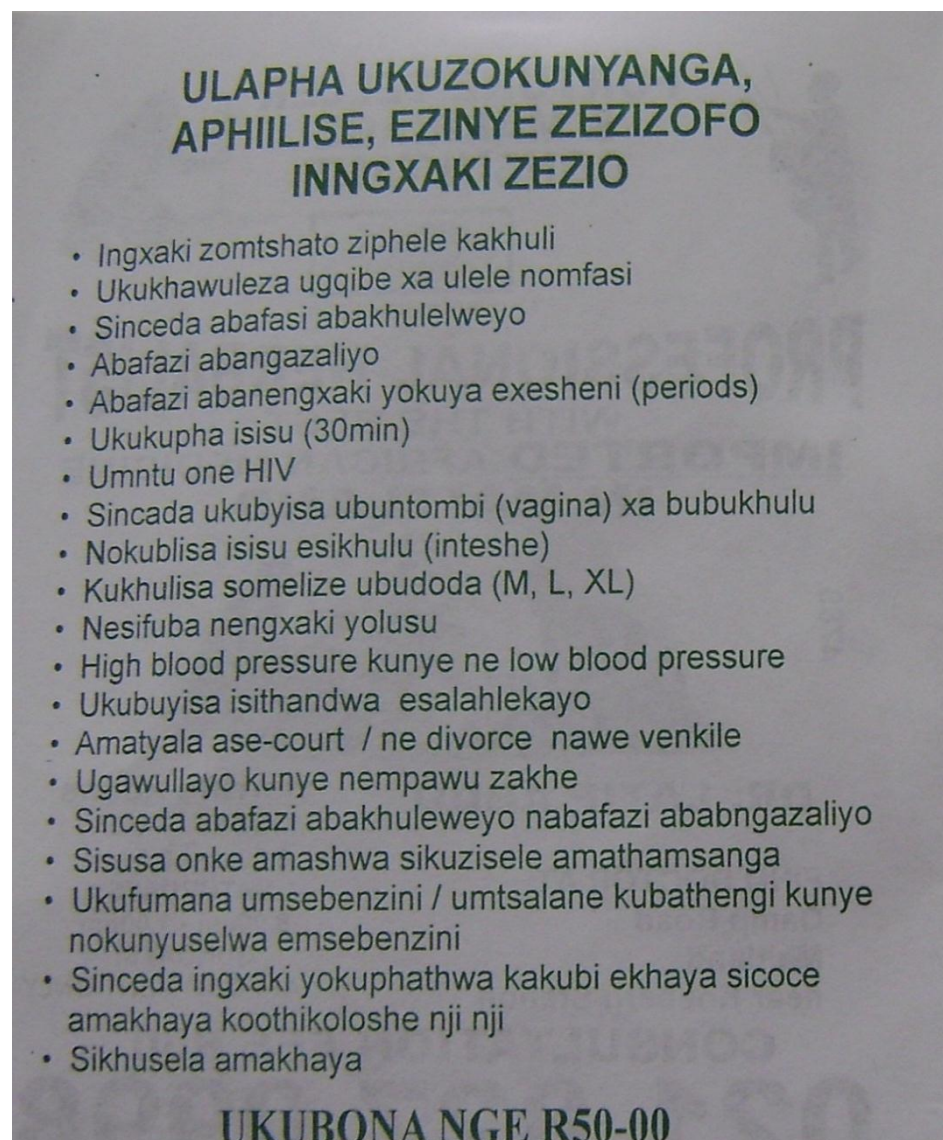


Fig 9b: Left inner panel of pamphlet: List of ailments and problems in defective Xhosa

An English translation appears opposite the Xhosa (Figure 9c), giving the Xhosa higher status as it occurs first, although there are significantly fewer spelling and grammatical mistakes in the English (e.g. "helped on symptoms", "win over of friends"). The first paragraph of the English version ("A Miracle Doctor from Ssesse Highlands ...") is not given in Xhosa at all. The Ssesse "Highlands" must be the Ssesse Islands in Uganda, which would not be known to many people outside Uganda, but are probably referred to here because of the name's exotic appeal.

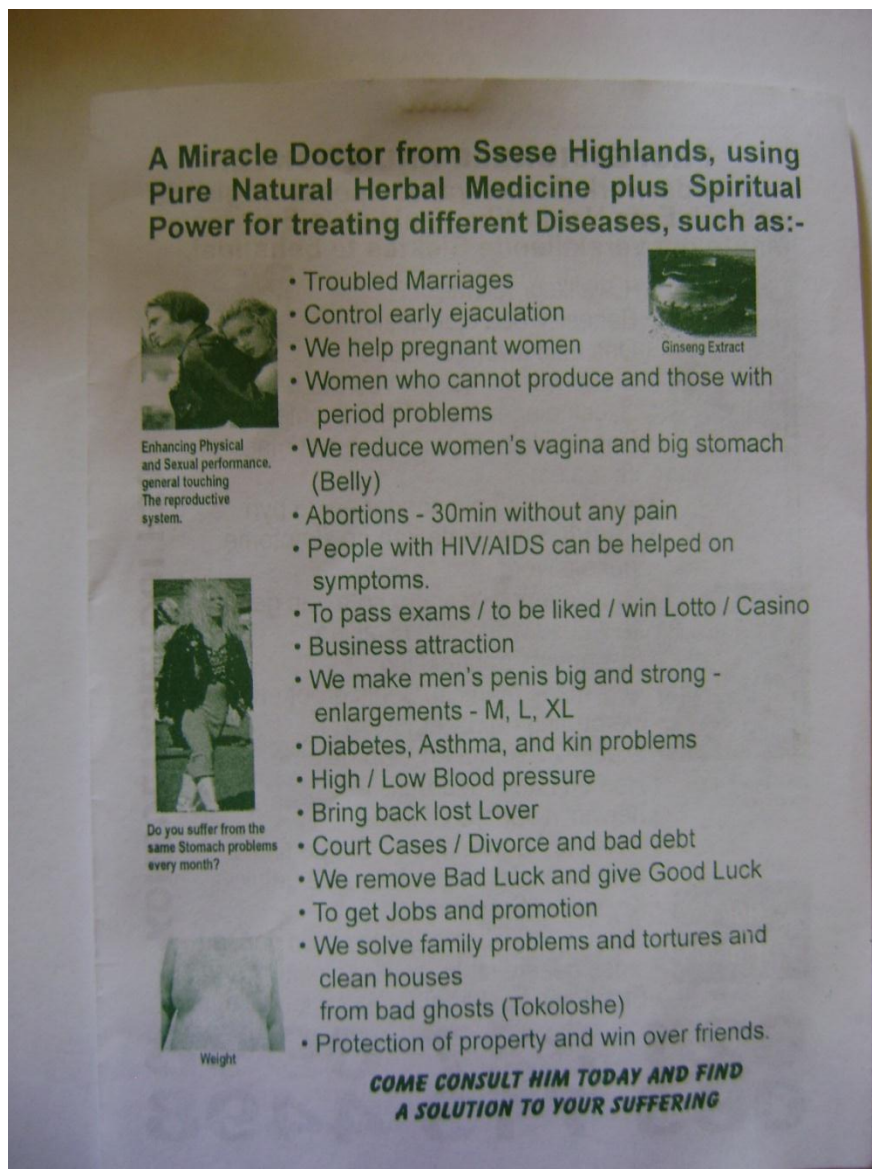


Fig 9c: Right inner panel of pamphlet: List of ailments and problems in English



Fig 10: Signboard in Zulu, Diepsloot, Johannesburg: “We cure all illnesses, diviner’s calling, erectile dysfunction, mothers who cannot get babies and all others”

What is significant in Figure 10 is the reference to *ukuthwasiswa*. (The use of the passive *-wa* with the causative extension *-is-* with the verb root *-thwas-*, which generally refers to a diviner's calling, suggests that the sufferer is not a willing recipient of the vocation.) This was generally viewed by researchers as a positive state in the process of becoming a diviner (Swartz 1998:164), but has now been acknowledged (by researchers and healers themselves) to include many problems and conditions (Swartz 1998:165). The author of this signboard is clearly aware of that fact and, by including it as an ailment in the list, is revealing a sophisticated cultural knowledge.

In Capricorn Park (an area of Cape Town with a population described by the 2011 census as being 30.2% “black African”) there are numerous signs advertising healing (see Figure 11), but they are all in English. This could be because 52% of the population claim English as their first language, according to the 2011 census, and only 4% Xhosa. There is an indication of a high percentage of foreign nationals in the fact that 8.3% of residents put their first language into the “other” category – that is, not one of the 11 South African official languages.⁷

A comparison of the language and symbols used in the pamphlet with those used in Capricorn Park township signs reveals that there is a matching of language with symbols. In other words, English is used alongside Western symbols (the red cross, the microscope) while Xhosa is used with either no images or very traditional pictures (see Figure 9a) depicting people in cultural dress, sitting in positions that reference a healing encounter with a herbalist or diviner.



Fig 11: Signboard for “Dr. Go”, in Capricorn Park, Cape Town

⁷ <http://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/199050008>

The very rarity of signs using Xhosa expressions like those in Figure 7 and 8 suggests that herbalists can no longer rely on their clientele to understand or respond to Xhosa proverbs or specific folkloric references, and also that it is far more lucrative to appeal directly to a wider, multicultural, multilingual audience when claiming the power to heal physical or psycho-physical ailments, such as not being able to have children.

Word Of Mouth: Referrals and Recommendations

While there are now websites similar to that of the Traditional Healers Organization that claim they will find you “a traditional health care practitioner in your area”, most Xhosa diviners and herbalists still rely on word of mouth to develop their client base. This form of advertising is conducted through the medium of Xhosa. Diviners and herbalists also support each other, so a diviner may advise a patient to consult a herbalist (Ngubane 1977) and vice versa. Anecdotal and personal evidence suggests that traditional healers still largely use word-of-mouth advertising. When we were looking for traditional healers in Masiphumelele township in June 2013, we spoke to people in the street, who referred us initially to a prophet, who in turn referred us to a healer. Clearly prophets, healers and herbalists, operating outside of the biomedical realm, rely on one another for personal referrals.

Conclusion

Swiderski (1995:43) speaks of the dialectic with biomedicine that is formed by traditional healing:

While doing what biomedicine does not do, the traditional healer tries increasingly to do it in the same way. While appealing to the base of a local, familial confidence in his powers, he in effect tries to construct himself into the role of the family physician ... all the while maintaining an indigenous African claim to his [patients'] confidence.

We argue that this emulation by traditional healers of something they are not is less problematic than Swiderski suggests because it is merely an attempt (in fact a continuation of their historical endeavours) at creating a confidence and a loyalty in their clients via external symbols and codes. Traditional healers have a historical claim to a deep, multi-layered understanding of their communities, and as their public's preoccupations change, so do they adapt their marketing strategies to incorporate this transformation. Thus music, dance and beadwork were all important in the traditional Xhosa context, being recognised as key cultural symbols, and healers exploited and elevated these symbols and codes to broadcast their services and index their professionalism. While healers do still use cultural symbolism (beads, white clothes, face paint, dance and music) to identify themselves and the services they offer, this symbolism has been adapted to new realities. New clothing (e.g. red gowns) and symbols (certificates, English mottos) supplement ancient symbols in order to fit new medical paradigms in which doctors gain their authentication via documents and degrees and not through any specific cultural knowledge.

It can be argued that on a national level the transition in South Africa's linguistic landscape militates against the use of indigenous African languages in advertising, and yet they are still used, when it is deemed expedient, to index a particular cultural purity or to appeal to a specific target audience. In the case of the writer of the pamphlet (Figure 9b), the Xhosa language is clearly used because the advertiser wants to reach a market he believes cannot read English. By his slovenly use of the language, and his obvious failure to have it reviewed by a competent Xhosa speaker, he displays an ignorance of the language and its orthography, but it is unlikely that many of his potential clients will take particular note of the numerous proof-reading errors. This factor leads us to the interesting question of textual representations of African languages in marketing campaigns: are misspellings and poor orthographical representations of our indigenous African languages now becoming (uncritically) associated with advertising discourses? Why did no-one, for example, complain about the lack of aspiration in the verb “*thatha*” (take) in the Lotto's catch phrase “*Tata machance, tata mamillion*”?

An analysis of the current textual marketing of traditional healers would suggest two distinct categories: a non-professional, BTL advertising approach (pamphlets, hand-painted signage) in which ailments are listed and sometimes miraculous cures suggested, and an ATL exposure via websites that is marked by reference to professional standards and conduct. Our research for this chapter did not include a study of ATL marketing in terms of television advertisements, but anecdotal evidence suggests that this kind of advertising highlights miraculous cures rather than professionalism.

Advertising by way of garments can also be divided into two categories: traditional clothes and beads with no text symbolising stages of becoming a healer, and Western clothes with text symbolising a professional status has been achieved.

Other symbols of traditional healers such as indigenous African languages, rituals, dance and music are ubiquitous and can often be found to reference “tradition”, and as such are encountered in ATL media such as websites, where they function as code for cultural knowledge and a generalised “Africanness”.

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Storytelling and Meaning Reconstruction: A Metaphorical Perspective

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Abstract

Storytelling consists of an interaction between a narrator and a listener, both of whom assign meaning to the story as a whole and its component parts. The meaning assigned to the narrative changes over time under the influence of the recipient's changing precepts and perceptions which seem to be simplistic in infancy and more nuanced with age. It becomes more philosophical in that themes touching on the more profound questions of human existence tend to become more prominently discernible as the subject moves into the more reflective or summative phases of his or her existence. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the metaphorical character of a story, as reflected in changing patterns of meaning assigned to the narrative in the course of the subjective receiver's passage through the various stages of life. This was done by analysing meaning, from a particular storytelling session, at different stages of a listener's personal development. Meaning starts as literal and evolves through re-interpretation to abstract and deeper levels towards application in real life.

Introduction

Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities... (Rutledge, 2011, par. 7)

Stories consist of events and experiences that are passed on by a storyteller or narrator to an audience. Storytelling is the act or process of transmitting these events and experiences. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines storytelling as the art of portraying real or fictitious events in words, images and sounds. Storytelling consists of an interaction between a narrator and a listener, both of whom assign meaning to the story as a whole and its component parts. Participants in storytelling make distinct contributions to the longevity of the process or event. For example, the narrator's ability to perform his or her task and the level of sophistication of the listener's interpretation influence the length of time the story will be remembered. A good narrator leaves a lasting impression on his/her listener. He/she achieves this by being skilful in selecting "pertinent details" and arranging the events into a "meaningful sequence" (Thompson & Fredricks, 1967:71).

Discussions on storytelling often revolve around the narrator's experiences and how they influence the shape and organisation of the story, the techniques he or she uses and how skilful he/she uses the

language to realise the intended purpose. The spotlight on the narrator serves as a turf from which to observe and discover things about him/her for various applications, for example, in forensic examinations and clinical therapies. The other participant in storytelling interaction is the listener. It is deemed necessary to find out what storytelling does to the listener. The listener may not have to retell the story, but does the story have any effect on him/her? How does the listener receive the story and assign meaning to it? Does the listener at a later stage remember the story and the experience? Does the story have the same meaning every time he/she remembers it? What does the listener do with the story or the storytelling experience and what does the story do for the listener?

This research article explores storytelling from the listener's perspective. A particular real-life oral storytelling session from a listener's autobiographical memory forms the basis for analysis. The article analyses the changing patterns of meaning assigned to the same narrative in the course of the subjective receiver's passage through the various stages of life, thereby demonstrating the metaphorical character of a story. The next section lays out the theory that informs the analysis. It is followed by an explanation of the concepts that form a tripod for this article, namely; the story, memory and thought development. The story that forms the subject matter will be presented and analysed according to the theory of conceptual metaphor, as it reflects in meaning assignment, followed by the conclusion.

Theoretical framework

The underpinning theory of this is that a story is a metaphor. A metaphor compares two objects, actions or experiences without using explicit comparative words "like" or "as". Chandler (2001:25) cites Jakobson's view that metaphor is paradigmatic in character, based on selection, substitution and similarity. Some of the terms that have been employed over the years and across sub-disciplines to explain this "similarity" between the two things that "substitute" one another via metaphor include "tenor-vehicle" (Richards 1936) and "target-source" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). The terms "ground-figure" and "signifier-signified" (attributed to Saussure) are also used to describe the same dichotomy. The Collins English Dictionary (2000:978) defines metaphor as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action that it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance". The latter definition also alludes to the occurrence of two things that are perceived to resemble one another. It offers the fundamental components of metaphor, but explains metaphor on a linguistic level. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary goes further to define a metaphor in a manner that does not confine it to words and phrases: a "thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract". This definition is corroborated by Richards's (1936:94) explanation that "fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of thoughts, a transaction between contexts". According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:235) a "metaphor is not

merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure.” It follows that, according to Evans and Green (2006:303), “we expect to find evidence of metaphor in human systems other than language”.

This article has its basis in conceptual metaphor theory, also known as cognitive metaphor theory. Conceptual metaphor theory owes its development and recognition to cognitive linguistics research. The cognitive linguistics perspective is that meaning is reliant on conceptualisation. According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor operates fundamentally at conceptual level. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5), through whose work the theory became widely known, argue that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. Metaphor is, therefore, not merely between words or phrases; it can be non-linguistic as well. An experience or impression can be interpreted or understood by a metaphoric link to another.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that metaphor links two conceptual domains, the source domain and target domain, through mapping. The source domain consists of familiar concepts that are coherently organised and the target domain feeds from it through conceptual metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson further explicate that concepts in the source domain are typically familiar and concrete while the target domain comprises unfamiliar and abstract concepts. According to their model *target IS source*. To this effect metaphors such as “*argument IS war*” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), “*love IS a journey*” and “*life IS a journey*” (Lakoff 1993) are used to illustrate the linguistic realisation of metaphor by mapping component parts of argument and war, love and a journey, and life and a journey, respectively. The linguistic realisation is, according to the conceptual metaphor theory, born of conceptualisation. Understanding of an abstraction such as life, love or argument (target domain) takes form from something familiar, a journey or war (source domain), thus conceptualising and expressing the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar.

Grady’s primary metaphor theory (cited in Evans & Green 2006) does not dispute the existence of the two domains, rather it specifically disputes conceptual metaphor theory’s concrete-abstract mapping. Primary metaphor theory argues that the target concept should not be relegated to abstraction as it also comprises “primary” experiences and that the difference between the two domains is a matter of degree of subjectivity. In analysing the meaning assigned to the story, this article identifies a source domain B and a target domain A, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980). The target domain is experienced and played out in terms of the source domain. What is observed in alignment with Grady’s primary metaphor theory is that the target domain will appear subjective in comparison to the source domain, as different layers of meaning in the story are unearthed through metaphor.

Story, memory and thought development

Storytelling is a participatory process involving a storyteller or narrator and a listener or audience. While the narrator relates the events, the listener receives them and attributes meaning to them. Stories may be told orally or in a written form, but originally they were transmitted to the listener by word of mouth only and were dependent on living memory for survival.

Memory is the ability to remember past events and experiences. One of the explanations of memory, according to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is that it is “the power or process of reproducing or recalling what has been learned and retained especially through associative mechanisms”. A person remembers something that has been part of his or her experience, stored in his or her mind and may be retrieved to fulfil a certain purpose. Often something happens to trigger a memory. In relation to storytelling, a listener stores a narrative in his or her memory and assigns to it a meaning that makes sense to him or her. This meaning might not be the same as that which the next person may assign to the same narrative. He or she knows and remembers the story as part of his or her life experience. In her application of verbatim-gist distinction to the interpretation of metaphor Reyna (1996) makes reference to experiments that were conducted in the 1970s on constructivism of the human memory. The results indicated that “memory was constructed based on the subjects’ understanding of the meaning of presented material” (Reyna 1996:41). Taking this to be the case, therefore, the memory of a story, in other words recollection of the storytelling experience is expected to be influenced, to a great extent, by how it was encoded and decoded. Although the human capability to retain and retrieve information is evident from early infancy, it gains prominence, momentum and complexity over time depending on the cognitive development of the individual.

According to Piaget’s theory of development (cited in Moshman 1999:7), “cognition is a developmental phenomenon. Over the course of childhood and early adolescence, individuals show qualitative changes in the nature of their cognition...such changes are progressive in the sense that later cognitive structures represent a higher level of rationality than earlier ones.” Notwithstanding criticism of his investigation methods (sampling) and development stages (how he views development to move from one stage to another) Piaget’s works have been very influential in cognitive development studies. Of relevance to take from Piaget in the context of this article is that children’s thinking is qualitatively not on the same level as that of adults and that this development happens gradually over time.

The capacity of people to recollect their lives is called autobiographical memory (Howe, 2000:81 citing Baddeley). Thomson and Madigan (2005:8) identify autobiographic or episodic memory as one of the two types of explicit declarative memory, and explain it simply as the memories of one’s own experience. According to Conway (1990), autobiographical memory is characterised by self-

reference, the experience of remembering, personal interpretation, variable accuracy of recall, durability, context-specific sensory and perceptual attributes, and imagery. Howe (2000:86) states that “a memory system that supports autobiographical memories develops slowly over the preschool years and contains information specific to events (e.g. time and place)”. The information that children are exposed to, coupled with their experiences, influence “what they encode, how that information is organized in storage and the manner in which it is retrieved” (Howe 2000:48). Thus, retrieved material is subject to continuous reconstruction over time. Although forensic experience has shown that eyewitness accounts are contaminated within minutes after an event, regardless of developmental factors (Esgate & Groome 2005), the difference in interpretation levels of retrieved material can be attributed to cognitive development. Retrieved information can be applied to real life, and in the case of a story, parallels may be drawn between the story and real life.

This article uses a real-life storytelling session from a listener’s autobiographical memory as the means to illustrate the metaphorical nature of a story. As part of personal memory, the story is retrieved and may fulfil some functions in real life. The function may be a culmination of the cognitive development, as reflected in the continuous alterations of the meaning assigned to the narrative in the beginning. The article reflects on the two conceptual domains, A and B, and demonstrates how meaning construction and reconstruction link to the development of human cognition as the research subject subjectively assigns meaning to the story.

The story and its background

The story serving as subject matter here is a real-life oral, undocumented narrative that was retrieved from a listener’s autobiographical memory. Therefore, the listener serves as the research subject. The original narrator was the listener's father, who told the story in the listener’s childhood (preteen years). “Although autographical memories may primarily represent interpretations and not facts, it is clear that at least some factual information is preserved” even though it is “open to distortions” (Conway 1990:12). Thus, this particular story may contain inaccuracies attributable to factors such as the receiver’s age at the time when the story was first heard and the attendant continuous “replay” of retrieval and reinterpretation in the memory of the receiver as time has gone by. The story was told orally. It was not narrated in English, but there are no language-specific aspects that could benefit this article. In addition, being part of autobiographical memory linked to experiences in preteen years, efforts to reproduce the story may prove futile as only pertinent parts survived. Reyna’s (1996) fuzzy-trace theory of memory shows that it is often the gist that stands the test of time rather than verbatim content. Essentially, it is the concepts that survive, rather than specific words and phrases.

The story went along the lines of:

There was once a father and his little girl whom he loved very much. The father worked hard so that the girl could have anything her heart desired. He gave her everything that she ever asked for. But on one fateful evening the little girl asked her father for the moon. Her father wanted to give her the moon but he couldn't. It pained him that there was a thing in the world that his daughter wanted to have and he was not able to give it to her. The little girl, on the other hand, was pained by the realisation that her father was not giving her what she was asking for. Both their hearts were broken and they died.

Other details of the story eluded the listener's recollection, except that an overriding sense of pity for the couple remained.

The reason for the long-preserved memory of the story is not clear. Possible reasons include the manner in which it was narrated, which the listener cannot remember; the listener was the only member of the audience and may have felt directly addressed; due to limited physical contact with the narrator, which also limited the number of stories heard from him, the stories stood out in her memory; the bizarre content of the story; or that because the physical environment contributed to the story being alive – the listener can remember that they were outdoors in the evening, and that the moon was bright. It is not clear why, but for some reason the story did not seem fictitious. It was perceived as being factual about people the narrator knew or had heard of; a perception that could also be attributed to the age and mental development of the listener at the time.

The following section illustrates the notion of conceptual metaphor, in which one conceptual domain is understood and interpreted in terms of another. Metaphor forms a link between two domains, namely the life in the story and real life.

Emergence of the metaphor

During the early primary school years the story would occasionally come to mind for reasons that hardly seemed to matter. The listener felt sorry for the little girl and her father, and she vaguely remembers wondering what kind of people they could have been to have been upset about the futility of yearning for the moon.

Ten days after the listener's 12th birthday, the narrator died. After his death, together with other thoughts, the story would come to mind vividly, first occasionally and then regularly. There were times when the listener became deeply preoccupied with the story. This can be understood as the significance of the story became apparent to her at the onset of adolescence, a stage when young people typically begin to search for and establish a specific sense of their own identity. This stage is also associated with their increased capacity for abstract and rational thought that enables them to engage in deep complex analysis of events and situations. The listener went through this phase after

the narrator had died and she could not confront him with questions about the narrative that naturally arose in her mind. The first of these questions was: “Why was the story told or created?” (The listener had begun to conceive of the possibility that the story could be fictitious.) Every subset of questions contained a different combination, influenced by different circumstances associated with the retrieval. Under the circumstances, the only person who could provide the answers would have to be the listener herself.

In her attempts to answer the first question another arose: “Did the narrator have an agenda in telling the story?” Perhaps. So, why did he tell the story? These are profound questions, signifying a higher level of thinking, seeking rationality about the broader question of human existence. The following are some of the subjective answers the listener formulated and that lay the foundation for the establishment of conceptual domain B (time of storytelling; preteen stage; formative phase; literal and simplistic) and conceptual domain A (years after storytelling; teenage years and beyond; reflective and summative phase; abstract, analytic, deep and philosophical). The listener reasoned that like the father in the story, her father had loved her. Like the father in the story he did his best to provide for her. Like the father in the story he wished he could give her everything her heart desired. But, unlike the father in the story, he was aware that some things were beyond his control. So, the listener guessed, he thought that forewarned would be forearmed and had consciously laid some foundation for the listener to know from an early age that although it is important to work hard and try to reach for the stars, not everything in life is within reach; regardless of how much your parents care about you. Is this the true meaning of the story being discovered or is it a new story being written? We will never know. So, we may as well continue constructing and reconstructing on the original narrative.

Two major factors that could have contributed to the questions and answers being different are the personal development of the listener and the physical absence of the storyteller. The continuous answering of different questions, the analysis of the situation, and the examination of several component parts of the story independently and in combination with others, all convinced the subject that the story was not about a certain man and his daughter but about herself and her father. With reference to Lakoff and Johnson’s view (1980:83), as a way of conceptualising the experience, the listener picked out the “important” aspects of the experience. And by picking out what was “important” in the experience, she could categorise the experience, understand it, and remember it. The two conceptual domains were thus clearly defined.

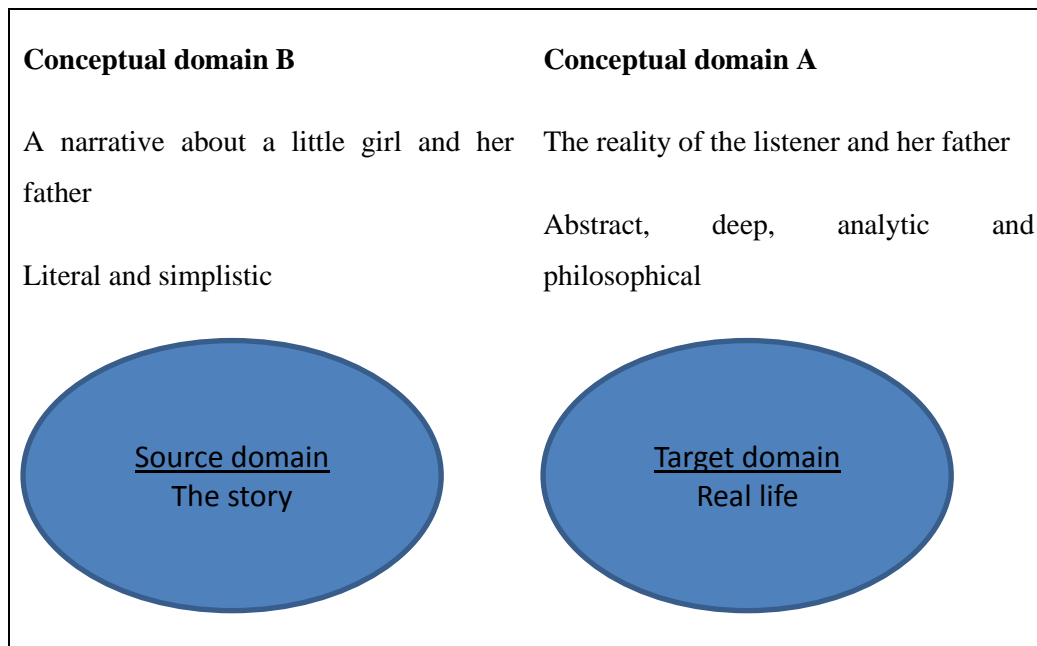


Fig 1: Conceptual domains A and B

According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor operates fundamentally at conceptual level and therefore should not always be thought of as a linguistic phenomenon. In the case of the narrative serving as the present subject matter, the story provides associations between non-linguistic realms, namely life in the story and real life. The conceptual theory model according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) advocates that *TARGET IS SOURCE* or A is B, which means that the target domain (domain A, unfamiliar) is conceptualised in terms of the source domain (domain B, familiar). Thus, the story as a whole and its component parts compares with and informs real life and real life's events. Looking at Figure 1 above, the source domain consists of components such as the father, the daughter, the moon, communication, actions and sentiments that the listener is familiar with from the storytelling session. The target domain is real life, which the listener tries to understand. In trying to fathom situations in real life, the listener uses the story, as a conceptual metaphor to map component parts of the life in the story to real life and its component parts.

In the case of the story forming the basis of analysis here, a set of correspondences gets established between constituent parts of the source (life in the story) and target (real life) domains. How the activities of conceptual domain A unfold is that the listener draws from the story and the whole storytelling experience to write the story of her own life, to direct it by making and justifying her decisions, to craft her own identity (Rutledge 2011). Therefore, conceptual domain B is used to shape or direct conceptual domain A and conceptual domain A is explained in terms of conceptual domain B. When the story is retrieved for application to conceptual domain A, questions like: "Why did the

girl ask her father for the moon? What did she want to do with the moon? Was she stupid? Did she not know that people did not buy moons in shops? Why was the father sad that he could not give her the moon? Did he expect to be able to give her the moon?" were not considered, because in conceptual domain A there is no physical moon, no physical father but only the physical daughter. So, "the moon" would change from time to time according to different contexts. The father would sometimes be a mere thought and sometimes a voice of reason. For example, when patterns of meaning were reconstructed, conceptual domain B would inform conceptual domain A that the father and the daughter wanted the same thing – look how devastated they both were when the moon could not be reached. Therefore, the listener would convince herself that her father had (and still has) her best interest at heart. The interaction of conceptual domains A and B would often create a platform for the listener to interrogate most real life situations thoroughly; often even the smallest of details of real life would make sense by mapping constituent parts of conceptual domain A with constituent parts of conceptual domain B. The moon would map to a variety of things according to different contexts of retrieval. The sentiments and actions, as well as the daughter and father would also map to constituent parts of the target domain, addressing philosophical, deep, complex, analytical, profound questions of human existence.

Due to varying levels of sophistication at thought development level, a younger listener tends to interpret stories in a literal and simplistic way while a mature listener is capable of abstract and deeper levels of interpretation. As the listener matures and develops cognitively he or she is able to reach different layers of meaning. The story stored in his or her memory that had an initial simplistic meaning, can later be retrieved for abstract, sophisticated and philosophical applications. The meaning will be naturally subjective in that it will be influenced by the recipient's changing precepts and perceptions. The question remains whether ultimately the real meaning of the story is discovered or whether the story serves as a script to direct the course of the listener's life. Either way, the meaning of the story evolves through different stages of the listener's personal development. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:156) point out that "metaphors may create realities for us ... a metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. In this sense, metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies".

Conclusion

This article has used an oral undocumented story to demonstrate that memory and cognitive development provide an opportunity for the listener to appreciate a story as a metaphor. In the preteen years when abstract thought is in the early developmental stage, the meaning assigned to the narrative may be literal and simplistic. At about adolescence and beyond human cognition meaning continuously develops into a sophisticated system that can handle complex and abstract applications. The meaning of the narrative evolves to become more nuanced and elaborate, developing into a rich

tapestry of cumulative experience as the similarity between the story and real life is established. The article has illustrated that storytelling creates ineradicable memories and that early experience can be a powerful impulse that deeply affects a person's whole life.

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Folklore: An Instrument of Conflict Prevention, Transformation and Resolution in the Ethiopian Context

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Abstract

The article assesses the role of folklore in the form of verbal, ritual and material objects as a means of customary dispute prevention, transformation and resolution in selected ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Samples of oral narratives in the form of proverbs, myths and legends from the Amhara, Tigray, Oromo and Issa linguistic groups are found to have cohesive functions that reiterate harmony among the respective communities and individuals prior to conflicts; conciliatory and mediatory functions during inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic or personal conflicts; and lastly, compensatory functions after conflicts. The familiarity of the content in the narratives and the beauty of the language of the mediators, usually the elders, transform the state of enmity into the state of tolerance and recompense. The pre-reconciliation, reconciliation and post-reconciliation rituals usually accompanied by animal sacrifice, as well as the venues of the rituals (usually river banks and under trees), create a local colour that foreground a feeling of exoneration, absolution, communalism as well as commitment to discontinue blood feuds. The material objects mostly used during the reconciliation rituals, such as *Tabots*, *crosses* and other relics of the Orthodox Church, *Kalacha*, *boku*, *Chachu*, *Siniqee* and *Hanfala* of the Oromo have a frightening effect on the people who want to redress damages by force. The widest usage of folkloric elements for conflict prevention, resolution and transformation is found to have a consoling and therapeutic effect on the material and psychological dimensions of conflict. On the other hand, it is suggested that concerned bodies should preserve and make use of such rich folkloric heritage that conform with the constitution of the country and international human right conventions.

Introduction

Folklore is a difficult concept to define. Bascom (1953) and Utley (1965) limit the meaning of folklore to verbal heritage while others such as Leach (1949), Dundes (1964) and Dorson (1972) extend the meaning of folklore to encompass all verbal, material and ritual components of an unsophisticated culture. This article takes the broader meaning of folklore that encompasses the sum total of all material and spiritual components of culture that form a certain community. Society and folklore are two faces of the same coin. There is no society without folklore and vice versa. Once certain folklore is created by a given society, it does not remain as a passive object (mirror) that reflects society; it is rather a mould that shapes a given community to behave in a certain way. Malinowski (1926) as cited by Bascom (1954: 344) summarises the function of myth:

It [myth] expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital

ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom.

Malinowski's summary of the function of myth equally applies to the function of folklore in general. Folklore shall be understood as a living matter that can influence a certain cultural community while itself being continuously influenced by practices of society. Since folklore is the foundation of culture, the basic causes and solutions of conflict are imbedded in it. Conflict and conflict resolution endeavours are major components of folklore. The basic understanding of folklore leads towards a better understanding of conflicts and their corresponding solutions. Researchers of conflict resolution must explore the basic qualities of folklore in order to identify lasting solutions for multifaceted conflicts. Accordingly, this article attempts to identify the conciliatory functions of folkloric elements in the form of oral narratives such as proverbs, myths and legends, and rituals and folk objects of the Amhara, Tigray, Oromo and Issa ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

Problem statement and research questions

Various scholars have attempted to collect and classify the folklore of Ethiopian ethnic groups in different contexts. Most of the investigative endeavours are, however, related to folklores of specific ethnic groups. The researchers have never attempted to assess and compare the function of various folkloric elements of various ethnic groups for conflict prevention, resolution and administration. Most of the investigative works are also concerned with the assessment of other cultural and moral functions of the Ethiopian folklore. The current study, therefore, is anticipated to fill this gap.

This study tries to answer the following critical questions:

1. What are the folkloric elements that contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the people of Amhara, Tigray, Oromo and Issa ethnic groups in Ethiopia?
2. How do the ethnic groups use folkloric elements to address multifaceted conflicts in their respective communities?
3. What common features exist within the conciliatory functions of the folkloric elements of the ethnic groups under investigation?

Aims and objectives

The major aim of this study is to describe and interpret the folkloric elements – oral narratives, folk objects and rituals – in the light of the conciliatory practices of Tigray, Amhara, Oromo and Issa ethnic groups in Ethiopia. It also aims to verify a major organisation of ideas and values related to the

prevention, resolution and administration of conflicts that exist among the people of the ethnic groups. In order to meet these general objectives, this article has intended to:

- investigate ways in which the folkloric elements are used to prevent conflicts;
- assess the way in which deviant behaviour is ridiculed or chastised by the folkloric elements;
- examine the means by which peaceful conduct is rewarded and belligerent conduct corrected;
- discover the manner in which the folklore of the stated ethnic groups redress the psychological wounds of victims of conflict;
- identify the relationship between the individual conflicts and those of the community.

Research methodology and data analysis

The folkloric elements selected for the current study are from archival written forms. The proverbs are taken from students' theses, articles and books stated in the respective discussions in this study. The myths and legends as well as rituals and folk objects are taken from articles, books and internet archives. I have translated and summarised some of them as they are indicated in the analysis section of this study. The folkloric elements are taken from the Amhara, Tigray, Oromo and Issa ethnic groups in Ethiopia that inhabit different parts of the country: Tigray the northernmost part of Ethiopia; Amhara, central and northern Ethiopia; Issa southeastern Ethiopia as well as Oromo the central, eastern, western and southern parts of Ethiopia. The study employs a method of critical discourse analysis to inspect how some of the Ethiopian folkloric elements contribute to the prevention, resolution and administration of disputes.

Analysis and interpretation

Proverbs

This article assesses the functions of oral narratives in the form of proverbs, legends and myths for conflict resolution. Proverbs are "short and pithy sentences forming a popular saying, and expressing some result of the experienced life in a keen, and lively fashion" (Coyle 1991: 80) Elders use proverbs to advise, ridicule, chastise, prompt and disapprove of disputants while they reconcile multifaceted conflicts. The beauty of language and the infused wisdom in proverbs makes them special tools of conflict prevention, resolution and transformation. Before conflicts, elders utter proverbs to warn people not to engage in conflict. Bamlaku T., Yeneneh T. & Fekadu B (2010:92), for instance, noted the significance of Issa women using proverbs to prevent the eruption of conflicts:

<i>Guul lagama gaaro daqaal sokeeye</i>	Conflict never ends and there is not success and prosperity through (it.)
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<i>Nabad waxaad ku wayday daqaal kuma helaysid</i>	You cannot achieve your goal through conflict instead of peace
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<i>Dagaal dad umbao ku baaba'ee dad kuma dhashaan</i>	In conflict people perish but do not reproduce
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Through these proverbs, Issa women warn their husbands, brothers and sons not to engage in open hostilities or confrontations. Proverbs are not only used to warn people not to engage in physical confrontation. Tadesse (2004:113) notes some Oromo proverbs highlight alternative ways of solving conflicts:

<i>Marii'atan malee maratan biyya hinbulchan</i>	It is possible to administer people by discussion but not by force
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This proverb underlines the importance of discussion as the best way of solving conflicts. Moreover, the significance of discussion is summarised in the following *Issa* and Oromo proverbs respectively: “The solution to a conflict is talking about the conflict, (Mesfin 2006: 5), and “*Mamaaksi tokko dubbii fida tokko dubbii fixa*” (One proverb causes a topic of discussion and the other ends it) (Tadesse 2004:59).

These proverbs train young adults to be peace-loving and communicative. They also discourage aggression. In modern theories of conflict resolution, the importance of discussion is equally emphasised. Moreover, proverbs suggest alternative ways of preventing conflicts. Some proverbs suggest non-reactive behaviour in response to provocative remarks, while others recommend avoidance from belligerent adversaries as can be observed in the following proverbs. Of the two proverbs below, the first one is an Oromo proverb that recommends silence while the second one is an Amharic proverb that underlines avoidance as a means of preventing conflict.

<i>Nama dubbii nama dhibe cal'dhisan dhiban</i>	When a person troubles you with a disappointing word, trouble him with silence (Tadesse 2004:64)
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<i>Lenegeregna sew jerbahin sitew</i>	Give your back to a belligerent person(translation mine),
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After an outbreak of conflict, proverbs are stated to facilitate reconciliation. In the Tigrigna language, elders say “*Neger bi’erki, mengedi biderki*”, which literally means culminating disputes through reconciliation is as convenient as travelling at the time of dry season. Another Amharic proverb discourages the value of bearing a grudge and retaliation: “*Eshohin Beishoh Aswegid*”, which means to avoid tit-for-tat. In Tigrigna, some proverbs warn elders not to distort justice. An example of such a proverb is “*Bila’e Nikersika, Fired Ninebsika*”, which means to do justice for your soul as you eat for your bodily comfort. This warns elders that if they corrupt justice to comfort their secular life, they will experience spiritual damnation. Thus, it is possible to argue that Ethiopian proverbs encourage reconciliation, justice and fair play between disputants and elders.

Myths and folktales

Through myths and legends, elders advise, ridicule, chastise, and disapprove of disputants who demonstrate aggressive conduct. They convince community members to support the existing communal order through myths and legends. In most of the legends and myths, the victory of good over evil, weak over strong, virtue over vice, soul over body, darkness over light and truth over falsehood is either explicitly stated or implied. Myths and legends encourage peaceful coexistence among youngsters. Some myths are purposefully told during peace forums and blood feud cleansing rituals. Others are stated in different contexts. The two myths discussed below are narrated to influence disputants at blood feud cleansing rituals.

Birhan (2011) notes a narrative that explains how a traditional conflict resolution mechanism of the Amhara ethnic group started. Its basic storyline is translated and summarised as follows:

Once upon a time, there lived two men, one with a large plot of land and the other without land, in the area called Amare. As per the request of the landless man, the landlord offered him a small piece of land. While the landless man dug in to build a house on the small plot of land given to him as a gift, he found a potful of money buried underground. He went to the house of the landlord, told him the story and requested that the landlord should take the money. The landlord, however, said that the money was not his own; he had already given him the plot of land and did not want to go back on his own word. He, therefore, refused to take the money. The man who found the money then said that he did not want to take the plot of land at all if the landlord refused to receive the money. Then, a night of betrayal and cruelty set in which changed the minds of both men. The landlord decided to receive the money, which was found on the land offered to the beneficiary. On the other hand, the man who found the money, the tenant, thought that he should own the money. He, therefore, decided to tell the landlord that what he had found buried in the field, was not money but ash. At dawn, the two men met on the way to each other’s house. Then, the landlord said that his ox had died the previous night; he was becoming gradually poorer and the money was his grandfather’s money. The beneficiary, in turn,

said that the stuff found in the pot was not real money, it was just ash. In the ensuing quarrel, both men attempted to throttle each other. Finally, conciliators handled the case and decided that both parties deserved the money, which was divided equally between the two men. From that time onwards, the system of reconciliation has continued until now.

This narrative justifies the very reason of the emergence and existence of the traditional conflict resolution mechanism in the locality, which is led by elders. It also implies that the only way of solving conflicts is reconciliation that places disputants in a win-win position. Another lesson that can be drawn from the myth is that greed, which is initiated by supernatural forces is contaminating. The myth, therefore, discourages greed as it is one of the root causes of conflict. It also encourages selflessness.

In the same case study, Birhan (2011) depicts another myth that encourages disputants to abide by communal decisions. Its basic storyline is translated, summarised and interpreted as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a man and his extremely handsome young son. For his marriage ceremony, the young man straightened his hair and wore smart clothing and a fine body lotion that exaggerated his looks. The father was highly concerned about an evil eye that could be cast on his son while the celebrants blessed the young bridegroom before his departure to fetch his bride. Then, the wise father thought of something that could divert the attention of all the celebrants away from the young bridegroom. The wise father deflected the attention of the celebrants by saying: “My kinsmen please get a look at that acacia tree! Look at it please.” All the celebrants cast their eyes on the green and beautiful acacia tree as the young bridegroom left the house unnoticed and galloped out of sight on his horse. By evening, the acacia tree, which had been extremely green and beautiful in the morning, was found to be dried up due to the power of the celebrants’ gaze, which had been cast on it. The wise father instructed that the tree be chopped down and used as firewood to cook the food for the feast.

Elders tell this myth whenever the families of the slain as a result of conflict refuse to reconcile themselves with the families of slayers disregarding of the elders’ interventions. Whenever all members of the community and elders repeatedly request families of the slain for reconciliation, it is thought that the obstinate individuals or groups will be in the gaze and attention of the entire community that can dry up an acacia tree let alone delicate human flesh. This is assumed to be extremely dangerous for the defiant. The myth creates a feeling of awe on disputants and persuades them to be ready for reconciliation. Such myths facilitate the resolution of endless blood feuds. Very severe conflicts are resolved through the medium of myth.

The next point of discussion is an Oromo folktale entitled “The Dogfight”, which is narrated by Mohammed and posted on *www.ethiopianfolktales.com*. It is summarised as follows:

Once upon a time, a dangerous conflict occurred in a village. First two dogs fought. Then, the two boys who owned the dogs fought due to the dogfight. At the sight of this, their mothers began fighting. Their husbands then also fought. Finally, the clan of both men involved in the fighting fought and that resulted in the death of eight men from each side. If the villagers had accepted the advice of a very wise old man called Robele Megera, who repeatedly told the people to stop the fighting from the beginning, both clans could have prevented the loss of lives. Even after the loss, the elders did not know how to solve the blood feud. Either each group had to compensate eight hundred heads of cattle or kill eight more people from each clan in retaliation, which would be very costly for both clans. An old man who was a passer-by saw the case and rendered his advice. He told them that if they continued to fight, it would be a disaster for both parties. In order to avoid further loss, he advised that the disputants should take a silver necklace from each group and throw the jewels into a river as a final resolution. Then, he advised, that they all needed to forgive and forget.

This narrative underlines the communal life of a community. An attack on one member of a group is regarded as an attack on the whole community. When one person is attacked, a solution must be sought by the whole community. Otherwise, blood feuds plague the entire community. Formal courts punish criminals for their wrongdoing. Other clan members will continue to fight since a solution is not given to the psychological issues and concerns related to a conflict. Folkloric elements such as the “the Dogfight”, however, address such issues by addressing the source of the conflicts. This story teaches members of a community to feel that the best way of solving a conflict is discussion and reconciliation. It also highlights the fact that if a slight conflict within a community is not addressed in time, it can cause a disaster upon the entire community. This story is told by elders in order to educate younger generations about the significance of peaceful ways of conflict resolution that heal the attitudinal, moral, psychological and economic damages caused by conflict.

Rituals and folk objects

Rituals and folk objects are essential components of peace building and reconciliation. According to Hoebel (1966) and Lewellen (2003), rituals are manifestations of a certain culture with a specific purpose. They are special means of creating collective feeling, exoneration and mutual trust among members of a community. In blood feud cleansing rituals of many ethnic groups in Ethiopia, both relatives of the slayers and slain accept the decisions of the elders offered at peace rituals. The slayer’s relatives feel that they have cleansed themselves from moral pollution and spiritual damnation. Families of the victims also feel that the murdered persons and their families are already honoured as per the requirements of the culture which they think is absolutely necessary. Thus, no individual tries to disturb the balance that is achieved through rituals. The majority of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia have their own blood feud cleansing rituals. Like rituals, artefacts (folk objects) are related to conflict resolution. According to Diakparomre (2009), the Urhobo Society of Niger Delta in Nigeria appropriates visual symbols and rituals to attain the support of ancestral spirits and divinities

to resolve various types of conflicts because artefacts symbolise commonly celebrated myths, customs, shared beliefs and communal responsibilities of the living and the dead. The community uses artefacts to build and regenerate communal consensus, solidarity and allegiance. Similarly, the Ethiopian people relate some artefacts with gods and spirits. They show respect to and are in awe of these artefacts. Therefore, the conciliatory function of artefacts is significant.

The followers of the Orthodox Church have been using sacred relics for conflict resolution purposes for centuries. In order to prevent conflicts of various kinds, religious leaders carry artefacts and plead with disputants not to physically confront one another by uttering the names of various saints, martyrs and angels. To illustrate this point, this article translates, summarises and evaluates Birhan's (2011) case study, which portrays a magnificent religious ritual practiced by both Christian and Muslim elders to cleanse blood feud among disputing parties of the Southern Wello Zone. In the pre-conciliation stage, the religious leaders are followed by many people in a procession to the victims' homestead attired in their own respective formal dresses and bearing their own spiritual relics. In order to influence the victims' families to be ready for conciliation, Christian elders bear *tabots* (models of the Ark of the Covenant), crosses, big richly coloured umbrellas, dome-shaped canopies, a picture of Saint Mary and cistern cymbals. Muslim elders carry bows and arrows. The priests and sheiks pray to their respective spirits to soften the hearts of the disputants. They also request disputants to stop blood feud by calling on the angels, martyrs, saints and God (Allah). The elders tell stories from the holy Bible and holy Koran that underline the importance of peace and forgiveness as well as the avoidance of feelings of vengeance and violence. Elders shower words of encouragement and blessing when disputants show any sign of readiness for reconciliation. If disputants refuse to reconcile, they face words of curse that are supposed to influence the body and soul of the insolent disputants for seven generations. The disputants, almost always, prefer to enjoy the blessings of religious elders and avoid the damnation of curses than to avenge the blood of their loved ones. After agreement is reached for conciliation, all the adults in the community gather at a ritual site which is usually a dried river basin or the top of a cliff. Then, one of the relatives of the slain slaughters an old barren black ewe, which is brought to the ravine by the assassin's relatives. Then, the sheep is held upright by its four limbs facing north. While the victim's family stands to the right of the sheep and murderer's family to the left, they pierce her belly from both sides with knives. After that, all the disputants plunge their hands through the holes on each side of the belly and shake each other's hands inside the stomach. At the same time, they wobble their hands until the blood and ordure inside the viscera is dragged out. This symbolises the union and reconciliation of both parties from the bottom their heart. The carcass is left to be eaten by wild animals. The agnates of the slain feel that they have shed the blood of their enemy, while the slayer and his relatives feel that they have cleansed themselves from spiritual and moral pollution. The peace ritual is culminated by oath-taking sermons

where religious leaders dictate to disputants to say an oath that threaten bad luck, death, spiritual and moral damnation for anyone who dares to ignore the reconciliation and initiate violence in the future.

Yilma's (2011) case study describes a conflict resolution tradition among the Wulaita community found in the Southern Nations and Nationalities Regional State. This article translates, summarises and reviews the ritual component of the study as follows.

When a person from this community commits murder, his relatives immediately look for elders who can stop the cycles of conflict due to blood feud. The local elders plead with the victim's family for reconciliation again and again because the victim's relatives do not show their willingness easily. After the victim's relatives express their willingness, the elders order the relatives of murderers to bring barren old sacrificial animals, a cow and a sheep, as well as a very fat bull for compensation to the ritual site called *Gutera* (a square). The infertility of the animals signifies the discontinuance of revenge, grudge and feud among the relatives of the slayer and the slain. During the ritual day, elders as well as all the relatives of both slayer and slain appear at the ritual site. To avoid any confrontation, the elders sit between the disputants. Next, one of the elders orders the young people to dig a *Huluqa*, a burrow, through which the murderer should crawl like a snake and pass from one end to the other, pleading for mercy and reconciliation. The *Huluqa* is dug on the side of a mound or an anthill with two holes, an entrance and an exit.

After the *Huluqa* is prepared, some of the elders secretly order the murderer to come to the site. Then, the murderer appears before the public with his face painted by *Shalla* (chimney soot) and his whole body covered by *Qoneshe* (dried banana leaves) in order to demonstrate the regret and humiliation he feels. This demonstrates that his murderous act is as dirty as the soot and as ugly as the dried banana leaves. With his two hands, the murderer drags a sheep and a cow that are too old to bear any offspring and mutters "*weqi*" (I am guilty I plead mercy), while looking down at the ground due to ignominy. Then he/she repeats the term "*weqi, weqi*".... and passes through the burrow (*Huluqa*) crawling like a snake. His passage through the tunnel symbolises his death. The murderer's self-humiliation influences the relatives of the victim to consider him as a dead person.

After this humiliation, one of the conciliators requests the closest relative of the victim, usually his father, to pardon the murderer, for he has already demonstrated his regret with full humility. Then, one of the victim's close kin expresses his pardon, for it is difficult to refuse while the elders are begging for reconciliation in such a ritual. Considering the regret of the offender's relatives, the victim's elders stand up and express their appreciation and confer a blessing upon the person who expresses words of pardon. One of the elders slaughters the sacrificial animals and paints the forehead of all the attendants of the ritual with the blood of the animals using his index finger. This is assumed to cleanse the blood feud. In order to strengthen the effect of reconciliation, one of the elders offers a

local drink made of honey in a *Buda* (traditional container made of a horn) to all participants of the ritual and they all drink in turn. This symbolises a genuine reconciliation between the disputants. Then, the fathers of both the slayer and the slain or any other close relatives of the two are seated side by side. One of the elders covers them with a sheet of cloth. Then, they hug each other and drink honey juice from one *Buda* (horn container) at the same time. This signifies a complete union of the families of murderers and victims.

Temesgen (2011) assesses a blood feud cleansing ritual of the Doko-Gamo ethnic group that lives in the Southern Nations and Nationalities Regional State. This article translates, summarises and reviews the ritual component of the study as follows:

When a murder case is reported, elders from the murderers' clan must initiate reconciliation with the relatives of the slain as quickly as possible. Their request does not get a positive response from the victims' relatives immediately. The elders from the slayer's side have to carry stones, as a sign of humility, and go to the homestead of the slain and implore for mercy and reconciliation for six consecutive Fridays. After the sixth Friday's request, the victim's relatives usually indicate their readiness for reconciliation. Then elders from the Bola Dona clan, who are honoured to possess hereditary spiritual powers to reconcile conflicts, organise a ritual on the seventh Friday. The Bola Mido elders, accompanied by the whole community, take the murderer to the ritual place. Bola, a spiritual leader, shaves the head of the murderer in a grotesque style known as *Gosha Mido*, which literally means mad man's shaving style. This denounces murder as an act of a mad person. The murderer paints his whole body with soot and wears an old leather rag that highlights the heinousness of murder. At the ritual site, the blood money collected from the murderer's relatives is strewn up into the air. When it is scattered, the victim's relatives jostle each other to gather as much money as possible. When *Shale*, an elder, slaughters a barren cow, he mutters: "Let our sin be as barren as this infertile cow; let it be culminated here; it will not come again since we are feasting together" (Temesgen 2011:99).

A nephew of the slain kills a sheep to demonstrate the innocence of the victim and to symbolise the death of the slayer. Finally, the murderer bows down until he touches the ground near the feet of the brother of the victim and begs for forgiveness. Then the murderer and the brother of the slain embrace and kiss one another to signify the end of hostility. Finally, they bite the livers of the sacrificial animals in turn and drink *Tela* (local beer) from the same container at the same time. This marks the end of the hostility and the blood feud.

Mulugeta (2011) states that the Oromo clan of the Adea Liben district has its own special mechanism of the blood feud cleansing ritual, which is called *Seareguma*. This article translates, summarises and reviews the ritual component of the study as follows: When a murder case occurs, elders carry

sanctified artifacts – *Boku*, *Kalacha* and *Chachu* – and request the victims’ family for reconciliation. For the community, *Boku* is a sacred relic that was sent from heaven in the form of thunder to Oromo, a man who is believed to be the founder of the community. Then, Oromo is said to have cooled this divine artefact in a pitcher of milk and kept it in his house. It is believed to be a symbol of *Waq*a’s (God’s) covenant with the founder of the community to preserve peace among the Oromo society. Therefore, one of the most respected elders holds it in the procession. The other holy relic is a *Kalacha*, a phallus-like object worn on the brow of elders. It is also supposed to bear the spirit of *Waq*a (God) to infuse peace and mutual respect among the Oromos. Like *Boku*, *Kalacha* is believed to have come down from heaven for peace building. Thus, another elder wears it on his forehead in the procession to prompt peace in the minds of the victims’ relatives. *Chachu*, a sheath of *Kalacha*, is a third artefact that is assumed to be equally sacred and influential in the pre-conciliation rituals. The three sacred relics influence disputants to solve their conflict peacefully. At the pre-conciliation stage, a respected old woman, a young virgin girl, the two elders who bear the sacred relics and the disputant’s relatives stand in their respective positions. Then, the relatives of the slayer plead for mercy and reconciliation. For the love and fear of *Waq*a (God) and the folk objects, the agnates of the slain agree to reconcile themselves with their enemies.

After the victim’s agnates accept the idea of reconciliation, the elders arrange another special ritual known as *buyaa*. This can be performed on any day of the week except on Wednesdays and Fridays. First, the relatives of the slayer and the slain, the most respected elderly men and women and youngsters gather in the house of the slayer. Under the guidance of *Abba Gedda* (the most respected elder), the participants of the ritual move at least five hundred metres away from the house towards a secluded ravine, usually on a river bank. Then, another authoritative elder known as *Wata* shaves the head of the slayer. Following this, the slayer slaughters a black goat, which is considered to be a symbol of restlessness and evil spirit. In order to eliminate the evil spirit that instigates conflict, the victim’s brother and the murderer pierce holes on the left and right sides of the belly of the goat through which they plunge their hands and shake each other’s hand inside the stomach. Then, the elders dictate both families of the slayer and the slain to say frightening swearwords so as to avoid holding a grudge and to seek retaliation. Then, all the participants of the ritual go to the slayer’s house to eat and drink together where they are accosted by two sisters of the slayer. While all the attendants of the ritual arrive in the house, one of the girls sips a honey juice and spits it on the celebrants while the other girl sprinkles water, which has been mixed with a bitter potion. While they do this, both girls jabber: calamity is gone; peace is restored. The honey juice symbolizes the sweetness of peace while the bitter potion connotes the agony of violence and blood feud. After the participants of the ritual take their seats inside the house, a bull is slaughtered and its carcass is chopped into small pieces, which can be swallowed in one gulp. Then, the slayer holds as much chopped meat as possible in his

two hands and offers it to the agnates of his victim each one in turn. The agnates of the victim bow down and eat the chopped meat from the hand of the slayer. The slayer, in his turn, eats from the hands of the victim's brother in the same way. The feasting on flesh symbolises the wish of familial relationship between the reconciled parties. Finally, the *Abba Gedda* elder orders agnates of both sides to say a concluding remark, "we have become one flesh", in unison.

According to Daniel (2002) and Tolosa (2011), *Siniqee* is a wooden stick, which is usually fashioned in a special way from the branch of sacred trees under which Arsi women congregate to conduct rituals of wellbeing, good fortune and fertility. Primarily, the women carry this sacred stick as a sign and cause of their inviolable dignity as married women. It is also their means of communication. When a woman is abused either by an action or word, the victim jabbars a scream locally known as a *Siniqee* scream as a call for support. In response, all women carry their 'sacred' *Siniqee* (stick) and assemble somewhere, mainly around the offender's homestead. There they chant ritualistic rhymes and boycott the whole community's daily activities until an offender becomes ready for peaceful dialogue, reconciliation and compensation. Finally, elders intercede and women are compensated for the damage done to one of them. *Siniqee* has another function. It is a sacred object that is used by Arsi Oromo women for intergroup conflict resolution. *Hanfala*, a soft leather waistband worn by married women, is another women's sacred object used for conflict resolution. When intergroup conflict is threatening to break out, the women will hold up their *Siniqee* and stand in the middle of the confronting men. They also loosen their *Hanfala* from their waist and lay them on the ground in the middle of the confronting parties to create a symbolic borderline that cannot be crossed by anyone. Since the sacred *Hanfala* is worn around the woman's waist, a part of the body which is near to the womb, stepping on it symbolises stepping on one's mother's womb, which is immoral. Disputants are also cognisant of the fact that ignoring the holiness of *Siniqee* and stepping on the sacred *Hanfala* would result in the women's ritual curse that pleads their *Waa* (God) to jeopardize the life, wellbeing and prosperity of disputants who ignore the women's request. Since women are regarded to be holy and nearer to God, no Arsi man dares to ignore a woman's request and suffer the consequences of their ritual curse (Daniel 2002; Tolosa 2011). The fear of *Waa* (God) and respect for the sacred material objects – *Siniqee* and *Hanfala* – play a significant role in the prevention, transformation and resolution of conflicts among the Arsi Oromo society.

Debebe (2011) studied a conflict resolution tradition of the Isa Community living in Direedawa Regional State. The ritual part of his study is translated, reviewed and briefly summarised as follows:

Since the Issa are communal people, the murder of one member causes disastrous conflict between the agnates of the slayer and the slain. Having recognised this fact, the community elders respond immediately to handle cases where murder occurs. If they encounter conflicting groups, they raise a

white banner and request disputants to stop only bloodshed. When murderers are identified either by self-confession or investigation, they are ordered, by the elders who administer murder cases, to handover a female camel, two cows and a 12m-long shroud for the burial ceremony of the victim. When a murderer identifies himself, the sacrificial camel is slaughtered by either a father, brother or any other close relative of the victim at the victim's burial place. When a murderer is identified through oath taking after the burial of his victim, the sacrificial camel is slaughtered at a place where the reconciliation ritual takes place. In both cases, the victim's male relatives chop up the carcass. Some portion of the meat is cooked and the remaining meat is left raw. Thereafter, they put both the roasted and the raw meat before the elders on the ground covered by the fresh leaves of a tree under which reconciliation takes place. Then, the victim's relatives offer the meat to all participants of the ceremony regardless of their age. This demonstrates their acceptance of the peace proposal offered by the elders.

After both relatives of the slayer and the slain agree to solve a dispute peacefully, a first phase of compensation is arranged within 15 days after a victim is buried. This community values camels very highly. In the first phase of compensation, the slayer's relatives have to bring 15 camels and the gun by which the victim was killed with Birr 1000 (approximately \$52 USD) tied to it. This demonstrates their readiness to pay full compensation. Then, the elders decide on the time when the full compensation should be given. Of the total number of camels taken from the slayers' agnates for compensation, the share of the victim's family is 15 camels only. The other 75 camels are taken by other members of the clan of the victim. After compensation is completed under the guidance and strict supervision of the elders, the slayer's agnates present a sheep to be slaughtered by a father or other close relative of the victim.

The meat of this sacrificial animal is left to be eaten by vultures and hyenas. This symbolises the avoidance of violence, bad luck and other devilish incidents. Oath taking and blessing are crucial components of the peace rituals in this community. The Issa believe that when their member takes an oath insincerely, madness, famine, pestilence and mutiny will be inflicted on all the relatives of the liar. They, therefore, urge a perpetrator to admit his guilt. Blessing is also a very important component of reconciliation. They start and finish their rituals with words that plead Allah to increase the fertility of the land, avoid conflicts and pestilence as well as render longevity for their leaders and eternity to their customary means of conflict resolution.

Conclusion and recommendations

The major causes and symptoms of conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms are imbedded in folklore. Better comprehension of folklore leads to better understanding of conflicts. This in turn leads to identifying lasting solutions for multifaceted conflicts. Accordingly, this article attempts to uncover

the role of oral, ritual and material elements of folklores in Ethiopian customary dispute prevention, transformation and resolution mechanisms based on some case studies that depict folkloric elements related to conflicts. It shows that oral narratives in the form of proverbs, myths and legends from the Amhara, Tigray, Issa and Oromo linguistic groups have adhesive functions among the respective communities and individuals prior to conflicts. The oral narratives reiterate the importance of peace and highlight the consequences of belligerent conduct. This helps young adults to avoid confrontation. During intra-ethnic or personal conflicts the oral treasures facilitate the conciliatory and mediatory endeavours of the elders. After conflicts, elders apply oral narratives to persuade combatants to forget and forgive. The contextual familiarity and linguistic beauty of the oral narratives transform the feeling of aggression into tolerance and recompense. The animal sacrifice rituals redress the psychological dimension of conflict. The ritual sites (mostly along river banks and under trees) magnify the local colour that foregrounds a feeling of exoneration, absolution and communalism. They also bind disputants into commitment to stop blood feuds. The folk objects such the *Sinqee*, *Hanfala*, *Chachu*, *Kalacha*, *Boku*, of the Oromo community; *tabots*, the holy Bible, pictures of Saint Mary, crosses and luxuriantly coloured priestly clothes of Christianity as well as bows, arrows and the holy Koran of Muslim elders in some locations of the Wello Zone magnify the conciliatory role of rituals and oral narratives. The widest usage of the folkloric elements for conflict prevention, resolution, and transformation is found to be wide-ranging and effective. However, there are no provisions that legitimise the functioning of folklore for purposes of resolving multifaceted conflicts at this time. Therefore, religious elders, non-governmental organisations and formal state organs should do their best to preserve and appropriate folklore to address conflicts in conformism with the formal laws of the country and universal human rights conventions.

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The *domba* Language Variety as a Vehicle of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

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Abstract

Among Vhavenḁa, *domba* is an indigenous initiation institution that both men and women attend. This is a unique indigenous institution which prepares young men and young women together in order to understand the importance of marriage, child-birth and other aspects of life. And as a result, this paper outlines the use of the language variety associated with this institution as well as its educational significance among the Vhavenḁa. The use of this variety, when *domba* is in session, plays an important role in educating young men and women to be responsible for their families and properties. In addition, cultural values and norms which are no longer observed today in many African communities are also taught by this institution. Although this variety promotes safe sex and sex only after marriage, it has also served as a breeding ground for a gendered variety of the language because it advocates that men and women should not be treated equally. Despite some difficulties, an understanding of the role played by the *domba* language variety in education by the Venda people and of the education received by initiates in this institution will allow us to recapture the space we need to reinvent ourselves, and to fashion knowledge systems and strategies to ensure a responsible adult life. This will empower us to become independent people capable of producing a value system worthy of our dignity.

Introduction

The modern world has resulted in rapidly changing behavioural norms and values, with pressure from all sides to conform, reject or to rebel against them. This paper looks into the institution of the *domba* and the *domba* language variety as a vehicle for perpetuating and conserving indigenous knowledge systems which are imparted to young men and women. In this institution, traditional cultural values and norms that are often no longer observed in urban areas are addressed through a discussion of the use of the *domba* variety.

Over the past two decades, elderly people have been interviewed in rural communities situated in the Vhembe and Mutale districts of the Limpopo Province with a view to develop an understanding of the role played by the *domba* variety and initiation schools as a way of passing down indigenous knowledge systems.

There are several types of initiation schools among the Vhavenḁa, including *vhusha* and *musevhethe* for girls, and *murundu* and *vhutuka* for boys. However, the *domba* is the main initiation institution

attended by both young men and women. Although all these institutions play an important role among Vhavenda, the purpose of *domba* is to initiate young men into manhood and young women into womanhood. In other words, they are taught the secrets of life and how to take responsibility as adult members of their communities. It is at these schools that the gender roles are differentiated. Ntuli, in Odora-Hoppers (2002:61), notes: “both male and female initiation programmes sought to prepare youth to take control of their lives within the broader community”. In almost all these schools, male and female roles are prescribed and, from their inception, indigenous languages have been used to impart the required knowledge related to these roles. Although these schools are no longer attended regularly by the members of the community as it was the practice in the past, the role they have played over the centuries in reflecting a traditional worldview cannot be easily put aside.

***Domba* language variety: theoretical perspective**

Domba, like any other institution, has its own codified variety that should be regarded as a social norm. This variety assists the *domba* attendees in maintaining their social identity. Anyone who attends *domba* should be able to speak this variety. He/she should be able to use it or should have a proper knowledge of norms of lexical items, expressions and norms of usage. According to Wardhaugh (2006:22), this type of social variety “determines how speakers perceive and organise the world around them, both the natural world and social world”.

In addition, Mulaudzi (2012:63) has noted that the natural world and the social worldview reflect an African cultural worldview which is the philosophy underpinning the total way of life in any given African society. According to Martin and Nakayama (2003), such a way of life may be seen as a system of thought, a pattern of behaviour, a system of values and material creation in a society that has evolved through interaction with the environment. The African cultural worldview is, thus, comprised of several specific elements, including values, norms, beliefs and religions.

It is through such a variety that the initiates and those who have already graduated from this institution are able to distinguish themselves from other social groups by reflecting the elements of a particular African cultural view. With regard to this, Hudson (1980: 24) points that the variety’s linguistic items make it different from other language varieties. In addition, Saville-Troike (1982:51) says, “there is variety of language codes and ways available to its members”. Therefore, the emphasis of this article is on the lexical items and expressions which characterise the *domba* variety as a medium of instruction. However, an understanding of *domba* is a necessary background to a further discussion of the *domba* language variety.

DOMBA

According to Stayt (1931:112), *domba* is a co-educational initiation school for both young men and young women. It does not operate like a normal school, because it takes place when there is a number of grown-up girls ready to participate. Also, it is necessary that there be a good harvest and plenty of food which will be discussed in detail later. The *domba* prepares the girls for marriage by teaching them the true significance of marriage and childbirth. They are also warned, through the same means, of the pitfalls and dangers they are likely to encounter during their lives.

The nature of *domba* and its supervisors

The origin of the *domba* is unclear, but meaning can be inferred from the noun form, *domba*. The noun, *domba*, is derived from the verb stem *-dombela*, which means *to become more mature*. This is reflected through the various phases of the *domba*, that is, the *tshikanda*, *ludodo* and *domba* proper (Mulaudzi 2010), all of which are discussed in detail. Stayt's (1931:112) maintains that the man who is in charge of *domba* is known as “Nyamungozwa” and is a song leader. He is assisted by a woman, known as “Nyamatei”, who supervises the girls. These two people direct the mentorship programme in which older girls and boys mentor those younger than themselves.

The semantic meaning of the mentors' names explicates their role within this institution. The noun *Nyamungozwa* is formed by adding the prefix *Nya-*, meaning “the mother of”, to the noun *mungozwa*, which means “the woman who has just given birth”. This noun appears to have been borrowed from the Shona word *mungozwa* (“the woman who has just given birth”), which means a woman who is nursing a baby of up to a month old. Although the semantic meaning of the name *Nyamungozwa* is feminine, within the context of the *domba* it explains the role played by the man in charge of the *domba* process. He is regarded as the mother (one who nurtures) of all the initiates and, as such the initiates are obliged to listen to him. The role played by *Nyamungozwa*, in this institution, affirms the role and position of women in the community. The name *Nyamatei*, a title assigned to a woman who supervises the girls, is likewise formed by incorporating the prefix *Nya-*, the plural prefix *ma-* and the verb stem *-tea* meaning to “lay the foundation”. This maternal figurehead conveys the basics of life to the initiates. Both *Nyamungozwa* and *Nyamatei* see to it that the *domba* is properly run and that the initiates carry out all its instructions in order to graduate. The supervisors perform these duties in the same way as all mothers who look after the home and the children as secondary. This dispels the myth that women play a minor secondary role in African communities.

Domba has three phases, with the first known as *tshikanda* followed by *ludodo*. The last phase is known as *domba* or *domba* proper, because it is during this last phase where the teachings reflect real life experiences. These first two phases are explained in detail in the paragraphs that follow. Like

other initiation schools, *domba* has its own language variety which is characterised by lexical items and unique expressions which are peculiar to this variety. Lexical items and expressions which characterise *domba* are, therefore, discussed according to these two phases.

***Domba* phases**

Tshikanda

According to Van Warmelo (1932:53), the phase known as “*tshikanda*” (a piece of raw hide) is a secret initiation rite for females and so named because the initiates’ attire is made of raw hide. This phase takes place on the first day of initiation before *ludodo* and *domba* proper. During the *tshikanda*, *vhadabe* (initiates from the last *domba* session) teach the initiates the principles or formulae of what is traditionally right, customary, ethical and obligatory. This is the phase in which cultural values and norms, which are often no longer observed in modern-day urban areas and some African communities, are also addressed. Once the initiates have gained knowledge of these formulae and the appropriate terminology, they are regarded as the foundation of the future generation and are thus referred to as *vhatei*. The noun *vhatei* derives from the verb stem *-tea* which means “to lay the foundation”. *Vhatei* gather outside the entrance of the main gateway known as “*khoro*” which is also an access route to the rest of the village. This is the place where the men usually gather and where strangers wait before they make any contact with members of the community. The *vhatei*, like outsiders who are not privy to *tshikanda*, wait at the *khoro* before they proceed to the hut known as *tshivhambo* for initiation. The noun *tshivhambo*, which appears to have been formed from the verb stem *-vhamba* meaning “to crucify”, implies physically taxing treatment the initiates. The name *tshivhambo* suggests that *vhatei* are taught to endure hardship and are given their first lesson in the python dance. During this phase, a *jhahu* (an ornament) is presented to Nyamatei and it forms part of the proceedings of *tshikanda*. The presentation of *jhahu* to Nyamatei is in recognition of her status and is symbolic for motherhood.

This phase focuses on female initiates as does the second phase or *ludodo*.

Ludodo

This is the second phase of *domba* which takes place two days before the *domba* proper. The noun *ludodo* is formed from the verb stem *-dodoma* meaning “to run quickly with frequent halts”, “to cower down and hide”. This name is indicative of some of the practices which the *vhatei* engage in during *ludodo*. These practices express the beliefs of the Venda people. According to Stayt (1931:113), the significance of *ludodo* is to teach physically mature girls about the hardships of

marriage, the signs of pregnancy and what childbirth entails. During *ludodo*, the *vhatei* also receive lessons in the python dance. The *domba* dance is associated with the python because this snake is part of a fertility rite. The initiates imitate the movements of the python when they perform the *domba* dance. Although they are allowed to practise *u ḡavhula* (meaning to practise pseudo coitus), penetration during sexual activities with men is prohibited. If one of them is found to have had sexual penetration, the initiate will be punished by the *vhadabe*. The punishment meted out to such a girl is known as *tshipata*. The noun *tshipata* is formed from the verb stem *-pata* meaning “to squeeze or compress”. As this noun *tshipata* suggests, the *vhatei* are punished by squeezing their fingers between two sticks known as *tshipata*. This practising of *u ḡavhula* teaches the initiates that a mature woman should have a male lover and this will make her acceptable to society. In addition, they are also taught to sing various songs which will be performed when *domba* commences. While they are practising these songs, a big drum known as *gangaliḡagovhamilenzhe*, and a smaller drum, *thungwa*, are beaten.

The *domba* proper

This is the last phase of *domba* which is attended by both males and females (Stayt, 1931:112). It takes place on the third day and is the start of the *domba* proper, because this is where the practical teachings which reflect real life experiences take place. The beginning of this phase is known as *domba ḡo tshoḡa* or *u kwasha gumbu*. The expression *domba ḡo tshoḡa* (meaning to break through a fence) indicates that *domba* is in progress. This expression suggests the disruption of normal family life and indicates that other activities performed by the community should be stopped for the moment. The expression *u kwasha gumbu*, meaning “to let the unknown be known”, indicates that the initiates are believed to know nothing when they first come to *domba*. By attending *domba*, the initiates will learn all the secrets of life. At this stage, the *vhatei*, comprising of physically mature boys and girls, are brought *u wela tshivhambo* or to be initiated. The expression “*u wela*” is used to signify the initiates crossing over into another state of adulthood by being initiated.

During *domba*, knowledge is imparted through practical lessons which reflect practical life as already noted. This makes *domba* a complete institution when demonstrative lessons known as *maḡano* (shows which demonstrate practical life) are presented to the initiates. The lessons are significant because the initiates, or *vhatei*, learn about sex, marriage, and childbirth and are forced to perform certain feats of endurance which humiliate but harden them. This is confirmed by Stayt (1931:124) who explains that the education initiates receive is intended to produce well-rounded, people-centred individuals. The following are some of the demonstrative lessons of *domba*, known as *maḡano*:

- a. *Ngoma ya singwele* (the demonstrative lesson of falling). The noun *singwele* is derived from the verb stem *-wela*. The purpose of this lesson is to teach female *vhatei* to be faithful to their husbands. If they are not, they may find themselves in trouble. The main purpose of this

lesson is to encourage husbands to be faithful to their wives even despite the emphasis being on the wives unfortunately.

- b. *Ngoma ya mbudzi na nngwe* (the demonstrative lesson of the goat and leopard). This is demonstrated by male initiates who play the role of drunken men. While they are drinking beer, the goat which they are supposed to slaughter is killed by a leopard. In this lesson, male *vhatei* are forewarned to protect their property and to be alert.
- c. *Ngoma ya muvhoro* (the demonstrative lesson of the young married man). The noun *muvhoro* is derived from *muvhoro* meaning “young married man”. During this lesson male *vhatei* are taught to defend themselves if they are in trouble.
- d. *Ngoma ya Thovhela na Tshishonga* (the demonstrative lesson of Thovhela and Tshishonga). This is demonstrated by male initiates who play the role of Thovhela and Tshishonga. These two characters are married men. When a fight breaks out, Tshishonga is defeated and his wives are taken by Thovhela. Through this lesson, male *vhatei* are taught to be strong and to protect their wives.
- e. *Ngoma ya nyalilo* (the demonstrative lesson of crying). The deverbative noun *nyalilo* is derived from the verb stem *-lila* (cry). During this lesson, male *vhatei* are taught to show their manliness and dominate their female partners during sexual intercourse.
- f. *Ngoma ya zharu* (the demonstrative lesson of the python). *Domba* centres on woman, and here the python refers to a woman. *Vhatei* (only males) are warned not to have sexual intercourse with a woman if she has had an abortion or a miscarriage. If they do, they will die. The woman is equated with a python swallowing an animal or a human being, which then dies inside the python’s belly.
- g. *Ngoma ya sali* (the demonstrative lesson of embers). Here the initiates are taught the hardships of life by being forced to hold hot embers. The noun *sali* is formed from the noun *sale* meaning embers.
- h. *Ngoma ya mavhavhe* (the demonstrative lesson of pain). The noun *mavhavhe* is derived from the verb stem *-vhavha* (pain). During this lesson, the initiates are ordered to engage in strenuous physical exercise and, if they fail to do it properly, they are severely beaten. The purpose of this lesson is to prepare them to face hardships after graduating from the *domba* institution.

- i. *Ngoma ya muṭoṭombudzi* (the demonstrative lesson of the grasshopper). Muṭoṭombudzi is a female grasshopper that represents all women. It is bigger than the male grasshopper. During this demonstrative lesson, the female *vhatei* are taught that men are superior to women. This is demonstrated when a female, who is disguised with rushes and grass as a grasshopper, thrashes the male initiates. But is defeated in the end. This is not a balanced lesson because it portrays women as weaklings.
- j. *Ngoma ya phalana* (the demonstrative lesson of the small impala). The noun *phalana* is derived from the noun *phala* (impala). During this lesson, the *vhatei*, who are referred to as *phalana* (small impala), learn that whatever they do, the chief, or *phala* (impala), should get a share of the proceeds.

It is clear from these demonstrative lessons that *domba* education is closely linked to morality as it teaches the initiates to take responsibility as adult members of their communities. Respect for elders is also given priority.

The parents of all initiates, who are mostly commoners, must pay a fee known as *tshiṭanza* in order for their sons and daughters to be admitted to *domba*. The noun *tshiṭanza* means “the money which is paid by commoners, princesses and princes in order to gain entry into” *domba*, is formed by the noun prefix *tshi-* and the verb stem *-ṭanza*, meaning “to vomit”. In the case of *domba*, the parents hand over or relinquish control of their sons and daughters to Nyamungozwa and Nyamatei who henceforth exercise parental control over the *vhatei*. Musiwana (a commoner) wears only *sheḁo* which symbolises low status. Girls from the royal family put on a *sheḁo* (a narrow strip of cloth between the legs which hangs down from the front and behind) as well as *palu* (bluish cloth with many white or coloured spots and stripes). These last two items, the *sheḁo* together with the *palu*, symbolise high status. The chief's wife wears *musisi* (a cloth worn by female as a back apron) and *palu*. The combination of *musisi* and *palu* are symbolic of a high social status while commoners' wives wear *musisi* without *palu* as a sign of their low status. This custom illustrates the stratified nature of Venda society.

On the first day of the last phase of *domba*, the most important person on the first day of the last phase of *domba* is a traditional doctor known as *maine*. The traditional doctor is assigned this important position because he makes a fire with a stick known as *tshiregu*, which is a piece of wood assumed to be female with which fire is drilled. This fire is never extinguished and is made possible by covering *hala ḁa mafhaṭa* (hot embers) with ash when everyone goes to bed. The *hala ḁa mafhaṭa* are sometimes referred to as twin babies, because the original embers resemble those that are used to light the fire the following morning.

After the traditional doctor has made the fire, the *vhatei* are taken to the *tshivhambo* where the initiation takes place. Inside the *tshivhambo*, each *mutei* climbs up two poles onto the roof and then hangs upside down like a bat. In this way, initiates are said to be performing *mulema* or “bat in a sleeping position”. This practice signifies an entry into a new stage as the initiates will have to do away with the practice of *u dāvuhula* (the practice of false or simulated sexual intercourse) and become responsible mature adults.

When the *domba* is in session, the *vhadabe* and *vhatei* form a queue known as *deu* and perform the python dance. This is the central feature of this institution. Every evening the Nyamungozwa plays a drum and this is known as *tshilondo*. In doing so, he invites the *vhadabe*, *vhatei* and others to attend the *domba* ceremony.

Tshilalandoima

As Mulaudzi (2010:157) has stated, the last phase of *domba* is called *tshilalandoima* because the *vhatei* remain standing all night, as implied by the compound noun *tshilalandoima*. This compound is formed by the noun prefix *tshi-*, the verb stem *-lala*, the subject concord *nd-*, the perfect tense marker *-o* and the verb stem *-ima* (stand). The Nyamatei, also known as *mme a domba* (mother of *domba*), orders the initiates to endure a physical feat called *vhulimu* (meaning to hold up the arms straight) by raising their arms above their heads. The chief however, has the jurisdiction to intercept this endurance test and may exclaim, “*Vho rulwa*”, meaning to let them rest. This ordeal continues all night; the following morning, all initiates are told to go to the river to bathe but separately. Men go in one direction, while the women go in a different direction. After bathing, the women are inspected to determine whether they have had sexual intercourse while the *domba* was in session. After this, the female *vhatei* shave their heads leaving a small patch on the crown, known as. Male initiates do the same. The bare patch is known as *ndobo* in the case of men and *tshiundu* in the case of women. Before the women depart for home, they put on a *tshirivha*, a skirt made of sheepskin (Van Warmelo 1989:421).

Linguistic components of the initiation process

In the context of linguistics, the *Domba* variety is taught to initiates or *vhatei* by *vhadabe* who act as the guardians of the initiates throughout their seclusion for the initiation rites. In addition, Nyamungozwa and Nyamatei see to it that *domba* is properly run and that the initiates carry out all the instructions of this institution before they graduate.

Domba is, thus, the term used for an initiation school for young men and women. This type of school takes place only when there are a number of physically mature girls ready to participate, as well as

when there has been a good harvest and plenty of food. It usually lasts for three months but, in some instances, can continue for as long as twelve months.

The *domba* variety is a codified secret language variety used in the first instance by the initiates, and thereafter when they are adults, to establish a specific degree of relationship with other men and women. It is used in this instance as a code to indicate that one has, in fact, been through the initiation process. The new initiates and those who have already been initiated use nouns and expressions that have been coined for the initiation process and known only to select few.

Vhatei must learn these lexical items and expressions when they are first admitted to *domba* and have to memorise them as they are a core part of the *domba* language variety. The *vhatei* have to use these lexical items and expressions during their stay at *domba*, because it is forbidden to use any other variety. Some of the lexical items and expressions are characterised by a neologisms (Mulaudzi, 2010:157). The following examples illustrate this:

Table 1: Some nouns (lexical items) with a shift of diction but not in meaning

<i>Domba</i> variety	Meaning	Standard variety
<i>miłora</i>	Sperm	<i>Vhunna</i>
<i>tshivhaso</i>	Woman	<i>Musadzi</i>
<i>tshiuludza</i>	Man	<i>Munna</i>
<i>tharu</i>	Woman	<i>Musadzi</i>
<i>masale</i>	Menopause	<i>Musadzi o vhinaho/musadzi a savhonaho</i> <i>Ŋwedzi/musadzi a sa</i> <i>Yaho maḁuvhani</i>
<i>phandu</i>	Fire	<i>Mulilo</i>

Table 2: Some expressions with a shift of diction but not in meaning

<i>Domba</i> variety	Meaning	Standard variety
<i>Dzivha Fundudzi</i>	Gate of the courtyard	<i>Khoro</i>
<i>Magona a lutshele</i>	The handle of the drum	<i>Zwa u fara ngoma</i>

<i>Mahatsi a mulamboni</i>	Pubic hair	<i>Vhukuse</i>
<i>Vho rulwa</i>	Let them rest	<i>Vho awedzwa</i>
<i>U vala khoru</i>	Pregnancy	<i>Thumbu</i>
<i>U vula khoru</i>	Give birth	<i>U vhofholowa</i>

Table 3: Some nouns are used during *domba* and also occur in the standard variety

<i>Domba</i> variety/Standard variety	Meaning
<i>Gangaliḷagovhamilenzhe</i>	The name of the big drum
<i>Tshipata</i>	Sticks to punish guilty initiates
<i>Tshiregu</i>	The female piece of wood in which fire is drilled
<i>Vhatei</i>	Initiates
<i>Tshiṭanze</i>	The money which is paid by commoners
Nyamatei	The mother of the <i>domba</i> ; female leader
Nyamungozwa	The mother of the <i>domba</i> ; male leader
<i>Tshikanda</i>	A secret initiation rite for females
Ludodo	The second phase of <i>domba</i> during which the initiates are taught the secrets of life

Table 4: Some expressions used during *domba* and also occur in the Standard variety

<i>Domba</i> variety/Standard variety	Meaning
<i>Hala ḷa mafhaṭa</i>	Hot embers
<i>Vho rulwa</i>	Let them rest

<i>U wela</i>	To be admitted to the <i>domba</i> institution for the first time
<i>Domba lo tshoṭa</i>	The start of the <i>domba</i>
<i>U kwasha gumbu</i>	The start of the <i>domba</i>
<i>Domba lo ima</i>	The start of the <i>domba</i>

Conclusion

This social variety of language has been used for decades by the Venda people to impart knowledge to young men and women before marriage. The information which they gain during *domba* helps them cope with life after marriage. This variety educates young men to be responsible for their wives, families and property by demonstrating lessons such as *ngoma ya mbudzi na nngwe* (goat and leopard). The most striking feature of the vocabulary of this *domba* variety is that most of the words and expressions are specifically coined for this institution. In addition, this variety also helps women to describe themselves, particularly the way in which their bodies function. Although this variety helps to promote safe sex and sex only after marriage, it has also served as a breeding ground for a gendered variety of language because it advocates that men and women should not be treated as equals. Evidence of this is illustrated in demonstrative lessons such as *ngoma ya muṭoṭombudzi*, and *ngoma ya nyalilo*.

Understanding the role played by **the *domba* variety** among the Venda people allows us to recapture this space in order to reinvent ourselves, and to fashion knowledge systems and strategies to equip ourselves for a future life as responsible adults. This will empower us to be independent people capable of producing a value system that conserves a significant indigenous knowledge system and enhances a special community ethos especially through its neologism.

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Taboos in the Upbringing of a Mosotho Child

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Abstract

In most African societies there are expressions that are meant to caution people against behaviours and actions which are considered culturally unacceptable or dangerous to lives of people. Such actions and behaviours, regarded as taboo, are observable amongst Basotho. Taboos are the sources of peace and stability in a society. They guide human behaviour and are a symbol of identity. Without the use of these teaching aids, Basotho children's lives will be disrupted. Thus, taboos are one of the fundamental teachings of Sesotho culture. This article is intended to demonstrate how the message is communicated to Basotho young boys and girls through taboos. It further analysed them to find out what is taboo about their intended messages as well as their relevance in the upbringing of a Mosotho child. Change this sentence to: Conclusions will be drawn from the discussion.

Introduction

Child rearing is given special attention in most African societies primarily because it should be done properly in order to mould the future of a child. It is also a communal practice in that it is the responsibility of every parent and adult. A well-nurtured Mosotho child regards not only the biological parents as sources. To a well nurtured Mosotho child, not only biological parents count as parents, but every adult is regarded as a parent. If the child is not raised properly, he is likely to face a bleak future. Whenever a child engages in undesirable actions, people attribute the behaviour to parents' failure to nurture that child appropriately. For instance, when a teenager or a youth is ill-mannered or has committed a crime of any kind, his unacceptable behaviour is associated with poor upbringing, hence the saying, "*ngoana ke seipone sa lelapa la bo*" (A child is reflection of their family).

According to Fromkin et al (1988:279), taboo refers to acts that are forbidden or to be avoided. He adds that the tabooic nature of acts makes their reference taboo as well. That is, a person is forbidden to do something and thus forbidden to talk about it. As a result, something else will be given as a reason for forbidden actions while the real reason is avoided or the reason is not provided and remains unknown to the child. For Basotho, questioning the reasons behind the taboo is seen as blasphemous.

As a result, children grow up not knowing the reason behind some taboos and when they become parents they fail to convey these social rules that regulate or police human behaviour.

Taboos are unwritten conventions that are communicated from one generation to another by word of mouth. One learns about a taboo in one's daily life activities. One gets to know what is acceptable and unacceptable when one is permitted to act in a certain manner or outlawed. Since children have a curiosity towards forbidden acts, either punishment is meted out if one breaks the given rule or threatened in order to prohibit the engagement of unacceptable behaviours.

Because education starts at an early age, some taboos are meant to guide the childhood behaviour of children while others are meant to secure their future as men and women as per the saying, "*thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi*" (a stick is shaped while still moist). Some taboos may change at a particular age or stage of an individual's life. For instance, a girl is not allowed to eat eggs as she develops but is permitted to eat eggs at adult stage.

There are several prohibited actions that Basotho convey through the use of tabooic expressions. This article examines the expressions that prohibit certain actions and determines why such actions are prohibited. It will also look into their relevance in the upbringing of modern Basotho children. The work is divided into four sections. The first section is a collection of expressions meant to guide girls, followed by expressions that guide boys. The third section examines tabooic expressions that are not gender based and the fourth one looks at whether this way of moulding children is still relevant.

Tabooic expressions for girls

Girls were raised with the intention of being future wives and mothers. Many tabooic expressions affecting them were meant to warn them against pre-marital sex and unwanted pregnancy, which were a disgrace not only to the family but to the community at large. In many African cultures when a girl married, a virginity test was performed. If she was found to have engaged in pre-marital sex, she was returned to her maiden family, and the bride price "*lobola*", would also have to be returned. In order to avoid the shame, girls were cautioned against engaging in activities that may result in pre-marital sex. Warnings against such behaviours related to food, attire and certain behaviours such as sitting posture. The following expressions serve as examples:

- *Se ke ua ja mahe hobane lehloa le tla khetheha mohla u chatang* (Do not eat eggs because it will snow on your wedding day): Eggs are very rich in protein and may cause early development which may result in pre-marital sex because a girl who shows signs of physical maturity but has not cognitively matured may be inclined to follow her bodily desires while disregarding the repercussions.

- *Se ke ua lula u kotsometse* (Do not squat): Girls used to wear *lithethana* (girls' attire made of threaded beads to resemble a mini skirt) and later on short dresses. Due to the nature of their attire (*thethana*/short dresses), they were not allowed to squat because their private parts would be exposed, especially because in the olden day there were undergarments. The view of a squatting girl was seen as enticing and teasing to boys who would then want to engage in unacceptable actions such as rape. Only boys were pressured to squat as it indicated a readiness and alert akin to future warriors.
- *Se ke ua robala le baholo ba hau (batsoali) – U tla hloba khoale* (Do not sleep in the same house/room with your elders/parents): Girls were not allowed to share a bedroom with their parents. The danger here is that a child will be exposed to lovemaking and night play. It is dangerous in that the child might hear or see what parents do and then imitate them or tell others. Sex-related matters are hidden from children.
- *Se ke ua ja likahare tsa nku* (Do not eat the sheep's offal): It is believed that sheep's offal are nutritious and may promote early development in girls resulting in engagement in pre-marital sex, just as in the case of eggs.
- *Se ke ua fihla hae letsatsi le liketse u senya litharisa* (Do not come home after sunset; you destroy family traditional security): Children who roam the streets/villages in the evening are likely to engage in criminal acts or engage in ill-mannered practices because they are on their own without adult supervision. Pre-marital sex, rape and burglary are mostly done during dark hours while elders are indoors.

Other issues that were of high significance were menstruation and childbirth. Girls, as future women, are cautioned against certain actions that may make them barren or that may bring them complications during delivery. Since adults could not talk about childbirth to girls, they used expressions that would hinder any action that might yield unbearable results. For instance, they warned against exiting the door on reverse or to turn at the exit. Although they were never told why, the fear was that when they later give birth, their children would be delivered feet first. In Basotho culture, a child that was born feet first is said to have *sebetse se sesoeu*, "white liver". A ritual has to be performed for such a child, failing which he/she will encounter loss of partners through death by the time he/she gets married. If the ritual is not performed at an early stage, it can be performed at adult stage to remedy the situation.

Menstruation was kept as a woman's secret and cleanliness was recommended during this time. Girls were, therefore, cautioned to take good care of themselves during menstruation and were also commanded not to pass or enter some premises such as the kraal area or the home of a newborn baby. It is a common belief amongst the Basotho people that a menstruating girls or women were not

allowed to visit a newborn baby as they will make the baby sick (Sekese 1975). If for any reason such a person has to come into the home of a newborn, a particular action should be taken or else the child will fall sick or even die. Similarly, not finishing water while drinking, it was believed that it affected women during delivery. The contention was that during delivery, a woman will give birth to children with long heads (with fluids at the back). Children of this nature hardly survive hence a ritual should be done to culminate this. The following are more of such example:

- *Se ke ua ema monyako* (Do not stand on the doorway): The meaning of this saying is threefold. It is believed that a girl will encounter problems during delivery by the time she gets married; a pregnant woman will struggle to give birth because the child will stop at the exit and be injured or even die; as a girl stands at the doorway, light penetrates and lead to people seeing through her dress. This would tempt boys who would in turn tempt her to engage in early sex. It was also said that one will have a heavy menstrual flow. Of course, all these deep explanations were not given.
- *Se ke ua qeta metsi ha u noa* (Do not finish the cup/calabash/glass when drinking water) (Lekhotla la Sesotho 2005/6): It was believed that women would give birth to children with long heads (full of liquid), which would also cause severe labour complications.
- *Se ke ua tsamaea patlellong* (Do not walk around the kraal area especially when on monthly period): The fear is that the livestock will miscarry or they will also have prolonged menstruation flow.
- *Se ke ua tsoa monyako ka santharo (u checha)* (Do not go out of the door in reverse): According to Mokitimi (1979:12), girls were forbidden to exit in reverse or return at the exit because it was said that by the time they are women and are to give birth, their babies will come in reverse (breach birth) or will come and go back or just stop at the exit. These might result in the death of the birthing mother, the unborn baby or both.
- *U se ke ua parola lihoofolo ka lehare* (Do not pass amongst livestock): It is feared that their menstrual period will be prolonged because of some traditional medicines/muti used to protect animals from theft and other ailments.
- *U se ke ua robala u hlabile mankokoane* (Do not sleep facing upwards with your knees bent). According to Mokitimi (1979:9), it was said that the uterus will move out of place. Such a girl will not conceive by the time she gets married as the uterus will be out of place.

- *U se ke ua ua tlola ropo ea phoofolo* (Do not skip a rope that is being pulled by an animal): Menstrual period will be prolonged because of some medicines that are used to protect animals from theft.

It can be seen, therefore, that most tabooic expressions were not only meant to educate girls but also to protect and maintain their wellbeing and that of the society at large. Basotho do not like frequent deaths and any kind of disability; they would do anything in their power to avoid such things. So, girls, as future women, were brought up in a very strict manner so that when they get married they do not reflect badly on their families. Parents had to work hard to nurture their children to be responsible and caring parents in the future.

Tabooic expressions for boys

There were tabooic expressions that were meant to educate and raise boys as well. As future leaders they were prepared to be brave, active and healthy men who could provide for their families and their communities at large. They were supposed to protect their families and villages against enemies as well as to respect and take care of their elderly. A love of animals was instilled in them so that they grow up knowing how to take good care of their wealth. On the basis of these, a boy, unlike a girl, was warned against anything that might be hazardous to lives of his family, society and his livestock or the nation as whole. They were not supposed to urinate on fire and water for fear of ill-health and security of their wellbeing respectively, not to eat the pancreas of a slaughtered animal to avoid laziness, and not to sit like women, and many others as exemplified below:

- *U se ke oa lula o shebile ka mollong* (Do not sit facing the fire place): Boys were warned against sitting facing the fire. They would rather turn their backs towards fire. It is said that they will cause damage to their reproductive organs. Too much heat will destroy the testicles resulting in them being barren or having baby girls only. Boys, as future men, were expected to have heirs. It was a shame for a family not to have a baby boy who will take after his father. In the absence of a baby boy, a man had to take a second wife in order to have a heir (*o nyala sethepu*).
- *Se ke ua lula joaloka mosali/ Se ke ua lula u ipharile kapa o namme* (Do not sit like a woman/ Do not sit flat on buttocks with your legs stretched): A male is a family protector and should always be alert; sitting in a manner that permitted him to rise with ease should anything happen. For instance, when the dogs bark, he should rise quickly to see what might be the cause of the disturbance.

- *Se ke ua ja phapooane* (Do not eat that particular part of a liver): It was said that he will always walk on the periphery of the road/ off the route/direction in all aspects of life (will never be successful). Some believe that the real reason was that this soft meat was normally spared for the elderly because they have lost their teeth and could not eat properly. The Sesotho Academy (2005/6) says that it is one of the foods that has a bad influence to the body.
- *Se ke ua rotela ka metsing hobane khomo eno e tla tsoalla ka metsing* (Do not urinate into the water because a cow from your kraal will give birth to its calf into the water): This was said to safeguard the cleanliness of the drinking water and the water sources at large.
- *Se ke ua tsirola nama ka matsoho* (Do not cut meat with your hands while eating). There is a belief that cutting meat with your hands while eating will cause the penises of male children to grow too big resulting in him not to lose female partners later in life.
- *Se ke ua ja manyeme u tla ba botsoa* (Do not eat the pancreas because you will be lazy).
- *Se ke ua rotela mollo, u tla tsoa mokunkela* (Do not urinate onto the fire; you will grow piles [haemorrhoids]).
- *U se ke ua sebelisa khamelo bakeng sa mesebetsi e meng, khomo e tla taboha metsoele* (Do not use the milking pot for other purposes, your cow will suffer from mastitis).

Tabooic expressions for both girls and boys

Over and above the expressions that were gender based, some were used for both boys and girls. Theft, ill-health, greediness, lack of respect, laziness and lack of confidentiality were highly prohibited. Each and every member of a society was expected to engage in work of some sort and to contribute to the community development activities. Any action that might lead to laziness and unnecessary expenses or any talk that might result in conflicts was done away with.

Death was mostly feared by Basotho and was regarded as a misfortune. Thus, they warned children and made them avoid anything that is likely to cause death. Children were not supposed to sit with their heads facing down or to put their blankets covering their heads or even sing songs that are related to death in fear that they might bring some kind of omen. Both boys and girls were cautioned against this natural phenomenon and many others as exemplified below:

- *Se ke ua sheba motho o moholo ka hanong* (Do not look into the elder's mouth when they are talking): A Mosotho child was not allowed to look at elders as they speak. It was said that the

child will be a liar, or will lack confidence in that s/he will say things that it is not supposed to say.

- *Se ke ua lula le batho ba baholo* (Do not always sit around elders): If a youngster was to always be around adults he will hear what he is not supposed to hear. Adults talk and share issues relating to old age which should not be heard by youngsters.
- *Se ke ua tsamaea u ntse u ja, u tla khala* (Do not walk around while eating, that signals greediness). This was said to encourage good table manners.
- *Se ke ua bua u ntse u ja u tla ba leshano* (Do not talk while eating; you will become a liar). This was for both good table manner and to prevent them from choking with food.
- *Se ke ua lula ka tseleng, u tla tsoa mokunkela* Do not sit on the path, you will suffer from piles.
- *U se ke ua supa lebitla u tla tsoa setopa* (Do not point at a grave or you will develop a boil on the finger.)
- *U se ke ua tsamaea har'a motse o ikhurumelitse* (Do not walk around the village with your blanket covering your head): Covering your head signals mourning and one is said to bring omen such as death.
- *Se ke ua lula u furaletse mollo u tla fetoha tšoene* (Do not sit with your back facing the fireplace because you will turn into a monkey): A child, especially a young one or a toddler, may get burnt causing unnecessary expenses and creating many problems for the family. Carelessness is not acceptable in Sesotho.
- *Se ke ua pheta tšomo motšoare – o tla mela manaka* (Do not tell a folktale during the day for you will grow horns): If this was to be allowed, it would hinder the children from performing their chores. Basotho do not appreciate laziness. They always want one to do something rather than just sit. They have the saying “*moketa ho tsosoa o itekang*” and “*matsoho a lemisetsa 'metso*”, meaning that if one does not take initiative, starvation will ensue and such a person is termed “*sekhoba*”.
- *Se ke ua lula u kentse hlooho ka linokeng* (Do not squat with the head between the thighs): Sitting with one's head facing down was associated with mourning. Elders avoided sitting in this manner for they feared that it brings some kind of bad fortune such as death.

Relevance of tabooic expressions

In terms of their educative value, taboos are still relevant, especially at this point in time when the nation is highly concerned about the rate at which people die of HIV/AIDS. The use of tabooic expressions becomes deterrents against unbecoming behaviour. People will then revise their way of living and adopt behavioural pattern that will circumvent any risky outcomes. This way of disseminating information through warnings should be engaged. Parents should show deference towards their children by not engaging in actions or discussion about certain topics in the presence of their children. Taboos are relevant because they assist in the upbringing of a Mosotho child. Because they emanate from the parents' life experiences, taboos often represent true meaning.

It was through tabooic expressions that children are taught self-respect and respect of others. Children are prohibited from questioning the rationale behind the use of tabooic expressions; they are only expected to observe the rules. The uses of tabooic expressions were to avoid life hazards and make Basotho self-conscious of their behaviours.

Most Basotho still hold to the use of taboos but the nature of their transmission (oral), results in many fading away. Even those that continue to use these tabooic expressions do not know their meaning, which weakens their transmission. The Basotho would not be where they are had they relinquished the use of tabooic expressions in educating their children. The high mortality rate of women during delivery, the high mortality rate of newborns, various diseases as well as a large number of deformed children could be ascribed to the neglect of tabooic expressions (Sekese 1970).

Conclusion and recommendations

In the preceding discussion, tabooic expressions in Sesotho have been highlighted. Their significance in the upbringing of children was shown. These expressions address issues that pertain to both boys and girls, for instance, they should be told that they should not eat certain food; however it is recommended that these expressions be revised. Issues pertaining to sex, childbirth, menstruation, theft, laziness which are considered taboo should be discussed and treated openly so that the youth, more especially girls, will realise that the consequences of their unacceptable behaviours will attest to the saying, "prevention is better than cure".

Taboos expressions should be incorporated into school curriculum because children spend most of their time at school and exhibit fewer inhibitions with their teachers than their parents, they may absorb the content of taboos better if they are made part of the school curriculum. This should be treated under cultural topics so that it is disseminated to a larger population for the betterment of their future.

In short, parents should not hide the core issue or the intended message but should feel free to discuss matters relating to the safety and wellbeing with their children.

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The Role of Folktales in the Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge among the Shona: A Review Based on Aaron C. Hodza's *Ngano Dzamatambidzanwa*

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Abstract

The role of folktales in the preservation of indigenous knowledge is explored. The article is premised on the study of indigenous knowledge systems and folklore studies, particularly the study of African folktales. By way of the documentary research method, five randomly selected folktales from a compilation of folktales entitled *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa* by A.C. Hodza were studied. Findings reveal that Shona folktales preserve indigenous knowledge by the use of words, idioms, proverbs, song and dance. Performing and reciting folktales help in assuring that knowledge intended for transfer from the storyteller to the audience is not lost. Collecting and publishing of Shona folktales are recommended.

Introduction

This article intends to explore how indigenous knowledge is preserved the use of Shona folktales. It seeks to generate discussion by stimulating new thoughts concerning the role of folktales in the preservation of indigenous knowledge. The focus is on illustrating how Shona folktales act as an instrument for knowledge preservation. Shona is the mother language for about 80% of the Zimbabwean population. Folktales are known as *ngano* in the Shona language.

Theoretical framework

This article is premised on the study of indigenous knowledge systems whose emphasis is on the need to preserve, and enhance access to local or traditional knowledge (Boven & Morohashi 2002:6). The paper is also entrenched in folklore studies, a broader concept to which the study of folktales belongs (Makaudze 2013:521, Tatira 2005:35).

Indigenous knowledge is defined by Owiny, Mehta and Maretzki (2014:234) as local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Boven and Morohashi (2002:12) describe indigenous

knowledge as local knowledge that is unique to a particular culture or society that is useful for decision-making within that local context especially for activities carried out in rural communities.

Folktales are traditional oral narratives in which legends, proverbs, music, jokes and stories about a particular culture or social group of people are captured (Shoniwa 2013). Folktales are a good form of entertainment but they play other roles: they educate and validate cultural and social practices (Turner 1992:60).

There are two forms of folktales, namely animal tales and human tales. The former have animals playing the characters of humans in a real world setting whilst the latter has human characters interacting with other humans and animals (Turner 1992:54–55). In both human and animal tales, the intention is to expose certain human characteristics, elevating those that are esteemed by society whilst disparaging those that are an anathema in society.

Makaudze (2013:522) views folktales as an important component of literature that today's society must not ridicule but should rather take seriously as they help expose and interpret the realities and challenges posed by life. This is contrary to some people's views that folktales are an art of the past and have no role to play in today's life experiences. Makaudze (2013) is of the opinion that contemporary Zimbabweans can gain a better understanding of the challenges they face and the solutions thereof from folktales. In fact, Makaudze advocates for the collection and preservation of this genre of literature to avoid a loss of the vital knowledge they possess.

Ngano (folktales) were verbally passed down generations by a storyteller called a *sarungano*. The *sarungano* were regarded with high esteem in Shona culture because they were custodians of knowledge and wisdom. As such, they were given the task of educating future generations; *ngano* was a way of passing down codified religious messages to children as they were prepared for adulthood (Matsika 2009).

Folktales bring people together since they are mostly narrated to groups of children seated outdoors in Africa (Hodza 1983:8). As the folktale is being told, knowledge is being shared for the greater good of the community; this approach assures that all present listeners are memory banks. The folktale itself and the knowledge imparted by use of the folktale would be preserved from loss following the demise of the storyteller.

Shoniwa (2013) is of the view that most folktales actually help transmit and preserve cultural values of a group of people as they reveal how that particular group lives. Furthermore, Canonici (1995:13) considered folktales to possess the power to physically and spiritually integrate a child in his community through the participation in the folktales. As such, folktales are regarded as a storehouse

of society's knowledge, a way of recalling and transmitting wisdom of the past through generations in an entertaining manner (Canonici 1995:13).

Whilst memorisation and recall were also developed through folktales as listeners of folktales were expected at some point to be storytellers to others, the practice guaranteed immediate verification of whether the indigenous knowledge imparted by the storyteller had been permanently acquired by the listeners. Apart from the names of people, places, animals and objects, folktales also embody proverbs, songs and indigenous practices, all of which were supposed to be memorised by the listeners (Hodza 1987:8). Memorisation assures the ultimate preservation and future recall of memorised concepts, which, in this case, is indigenous knowledge.

Folktales are associated with performance; they integrate language (words), music and dance (Hodza 1983:8; Canonici 1995:16). By way of performance, folktales make it easy for society to carry forward indigenous knowledge associated with the performance. Similarly, the songs and dances constituting part of the folktales encompass some particular indigenous knowledge about certain practices such as rain-making, courtship, among others. This means that the songs can retain and, of course, transfer the indigenous knowledge they contain without necessarily reciting the entire folktale from which the song is borrowed.

Research methodology

Research findings presented in this article are based on an analysis of a compilation of folktales entitled *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa* by A.C. Hodza entitled. The documentary research method was therefore used. The documentary research method is described by Ahmed (2010:2) as the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon studied by investigating and categorising physical sources, most commonly written documents. Mogalakwe (2006:221) considers documentary methods as the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomenon one wishes to study. Documents contain written text and are produced by individuals or groups in the course of their everyday practices for their own immediate practical needs (Mogalakwe 2006:222).

The use of this research method is justified in view of Ahmed (2010:2) and Mogalakwe's (2006:221, 222) considerations that it is a good and sometimes more cost effective method as opposed to social surveys, in-depth interviews or participant observations. They (Ahmed 2010; Mogalakwe (2006) further argue that just like surveys and ethnography, documentary research is one of the most widely used of the three major types of social research such that some leading sociologists have been using it as the principal method and sometimes as the only one.

Documentary research is better suited for the study of the past rather than of the present considering that documents survived over periods of time whether recent or ancient; thus documentary research has become largely the preserve of historians (McCulloch 2004:i). McCulloch (2004:i) is of the opinion that books, reports, newspapers and creative literature provide useful information as evidence on public issues, debates, and everyday life and experience. Despite being underestimated, creative literature such as folktales can be a good source of evidence if carefully used (McCulloch 2004:64).

Mogalakwe (2006: 221) suggests that carrying out research using documentary sources is not different from other areas of social research in that in every case data needs to be handled scientifically using some quality control criteria namely: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. The same criteria are supported by McCulloch (2004:35) which he refers to as rules.

The folktales compilation is considered authentic. Authenticity relates to a document being original or genuine such that it can be depended upon (Mogalakwe 2006:224). *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa* met this criterion since it is an original compilation that underwent an editorial process prior to publication. Similarly, the book is considered credible because it was subjected to publishing processes during which errors and distortions were eliminated. Mogalakwe (2006:227) and McCulloch (2004:36) describe representativeness as the level of a document to stand in place of others of a similar nature. A document that is representative of others could therefore be regarded as a sample. The collection folktales selected are a true representation of other folktales in Shona and compares easily with other collections such as *Ngano Volume 1 and Ngano Volume 2* by George Fortune.

Helm (2000) points out that document analysis can be undertaken through analytical reading, content analysis or quantitative analysis. The researchers used content analysis to gather data from the document under study. Content analysis is defined by Kondracki, Wellman and Amundson (2002:224) as the process of systematically analysing messages in any type of communication. They considered content analysis as a technique that overlaps between qualitative and quantitative techniques because it is a technique that allows for the qualitative analysis of seemingly quantitative data. Kondracki, Wellman and Amundson (2002:224) suggest that content analysis can be used to develop inferences about a subject by coding messages according to themes. The content of five randomly selected folktales was analysed in the study.

Synopsis of the folktales used

The first folktale, entitled “Vasikana nevakomana shumba”, is a story of three girls who fell in love with three young men from a faraway place. The lovers decided to marry. The three girls agreed to elope with their lovers and during the process they had to take with them their young brother who had

accompanied them to the well to fetch some water. The young brother later discovered that his sisters' lovers would mysteriously change into lions. The young brother had to weave a basket which he, together with his sisters, used to escape from the boys who had transformed into lions and had decided to feast on them.

The second folktale entitled, "Mwanasikana neyabereki vake", is about a couple who over-protected their daughter to an extent of barring young men from proposing marriage to her. A certain young man tricked the family by pretending to get bark-string from a baobab tree for the purpose of "ferrying" his parents' fields and well closer to the home. The "idea" looked so interesting such that the girl's family thought of engaging the young man. In the process, the young man and woman fell in love and got married. The "plan" of bringing the wells and fields closer to home was later realised to be a mere scheme to win the girl's heart.

In the third folktale, "Mudzimai akadyiswa muko", a couple had daughters only. The husband then decided to marry a second wife who could possibly give birth to boy children. Indeed, the second wife gave birth to sons. The husband got so pleased with the second wife that the first wife felt rejected. To reclaim her "lost" husband, the first wife mixed gravy extracted from cooked baboon meat with the second wife's relish. The second wife's family totem was Baboon and having eaten a relish mixed with such gravy, she was cursed, transformed into a baboon she disappeared into the bush. The second wife's parents had to find a sangoma to transform their daughter back into a human being. Thereafter, the parents withheld their daughter from returning to her husband.

The fourth tale, entitled "Gudo naTuro", is about Baboon and Hare who were friends. One of the days Baboon asks Hare to accompany him to his in-laws. Along the way, Hare uses various tricks to eat the food they had taken for the journey alone. At Baboon's in-laws, the two are tasked to guard the in-laws' goats against hyenas by sleeping in the goats' kraal. Baboon and Hare hatched a plan to slaughter one of the goats at night; Hare once again tricked Baboon such that the latter never had a piece of the meat they had cooked. In the morning the in-laws discovered that one of the goats had been slaughtered and Hare treacherously convinced Baboon's in-laws to believe that their in-law was responsible. Baboon is killed and Hare takes Baboon's wife.

The fifth folktale, "Vakomana vakapfudzana pamusikana", recounts the story of a young man called Chiwareware who visits his uncle and aunt. During his visit he falls in love with a girl who lived nearby. After paying the bride price, the young man had to pay a courtesy visit to his in-laws. As part of the visit, Chiwareware was tasked by his in-laws to weed a field. Another young man in the neighbourhood who had been vying for the same girl's love killed some lizards and put them in the fire that had been left by the field-side by Chiwareware when he was warming himself. When Chiwareware's lover brought him food to eat, she was shocked to find some lizards being roasted on

the fire; she thought that her husband-to-be had eaten the lizards. When Chiwareware came for his food, he thought his wife-to-be had eaten lizards. An argument started and the two broke up. The young man who had put the lizards on the fire took advantage of the situation and married the girl.

Findings

The findings are split into two sections; the first section presents the elements of indigenous knowledge preserved by Shona folktales whilst the second section outlines ways used to preserve the indigenous knowledge found in Shona folktales.

Indigenous Knowledge Preserved

Words (names of places, objects, animals, time, etc.)

The language itself was preserved in *ngano*. Folktales are ideally shared orally. As the folk storyteller shared his or her story new words would be introduced; meaning and interpretation could be derived by the listeners but most importantly, the storytellers had to explain the concepts to the listeners.

From the folktales in *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*, the following examples were picked:

Sub-theme	Example	Meaning	Page(s)	Folktale(s)
New words				
	<i>Mariga</i>	God	12	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
	<i>Kukuhwa [moto]</i>	Kindle [fire]	13	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
	<i>Guruguda</i>	Remove meat from bone with teeth	13	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
	<i>Musumbu/ mushunje</i>	Bundle of grass	15	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
	<i>Gandanga</i>	Wild person	15	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
	<i>Guchu</i>	Calabash used to carry food or drink on a journey	24	“Mwanasikana nevakomana vake”

Place names				
	<i>Chiro</i>	Baboon's sleeping place	25	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
	<i>Nhanga</i>	Bedroom for unmarried girls	26,28	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
Time				
	<i>Mukanganyama</i>	Early morning/ break of day	24	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
	<i>Runyanhiriri</i>	Break of day	25	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
	<i>Rufurambwe</i>	Dusk/nightfall	26	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
	<i>Marambakuedza</i>	Very early in the morning	27	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"

Idioms and proverbs

Ngano also use idioms and proverbs to convey some messages. Here are some examples extracted from *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*:

Example	English translation	Page(s)	Folktale
<i>Mariga akombora</i>	God has blessed us	12	"Vasikana nevakomana shumba"
<i>Kakova kaMusinzwi kadira muna Taisireva</i>	The stream of Musinzwi (disobedience) has drained itself into the stream of Taisireva (we said so)	22	"Vasikana nevakomana shumba"
<i>Kuzivana nemusikana</i>	Fall in love / get intimate	28	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"
<i>Tsika mwedzi</i>	Miss a monthly menstrual (possibly pregnant)	28	"Mwanasikana nevbereki vake"

Song and Dance

Song and dance are also found in Shona folktales. Below are examples of songs that were found in the collection of folktales under study:

Example	English translation	Page(s)	Folktale
<i>Mushauri: Vana vedu marema</i> <i>Vadaviri: Tevera zvine muswe wazvo</i>	Soloist: Our children are mentally retarded Chorus: Follow those that have tails	17	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
<i>Muimbi: Ihe ihe vakafa havana chavakaona;</i> <i>Zvino ndozviudza ani baba akafa,</i> ...	Singer: Ihe ihe those who have died have nothing they’ve seen; Whom shall I tell my father is dead, ...	57	“Mudzimai akadyiswa muko”

Cultural and Religious Norms and Practices

Concepts relating to culture, religion and the social issues of a community are portrayed in folktales. In fact, it is the religious and socio-cultural setting of the community that shapes the issues captured in the folktales. Below are some excerpts from the *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*.

Example	English translation	Page(s)	Folktale
<i>Rooranai vematongo</i>	Marry someone whose family/ background you’re familiar with	12	“Vasikana nevakomana shumba”
<i>Kugamuchira / kubata zvakanaka vaeni</i>	Hospitality to visitors	24-28	“Mwanasikana nevabereki vake”
<i>Kutumira roora kuburikidza nasadombo/munyai</i>	Sending lobola to the in-laws by a mediator / middle man	29	“Mwanasikana nevabereki vake”
<i>Kutsvaira dota / kuonekera</i>	Son-in-law’s first customary visit	29	“Mwanasikana nevabereki vake”
<i>Kutizisa mukumbo</i>	Elope	30	“Mwanasikana nevabereki vake”

<i>Kutukana utukwa (Chizukuru)</i>		Jokes, pleasantry/ humour between uncles & nephews/ nieces	75	“Vakomana vakapfudzana pamusikana”
<i>Kutsvetsva kuburikidza nambuya</i>	<i>musikana nasekuru</i>	Courting a girl through the help of uncles and aunties	75	“Vakomana vakapfudzana pamusikana”

How Indigenous Knowledge was Preserved in *Ngano*

In the first instance, it must be realised that after the *sarungano* had recited a folktale to listeners, he would at another time tell the same folktale again. Besides, there were instances when the listeners would request the *sarungano* to recite a folktale they had heard to earlier on. In that way, a folktale would be easily recalled. In some cases, the *sarungano* would randomly pick any one of his listeners to recite a folktale. The *sarungano* would assist the young ones whenever they failed to remember folktale correctly.

Coupled with the fascinating use of animals instead of human beings, a storyteller would unfold a folktale to an audience. Besides getting to know the name of wild animals and insects, the children listening to the folktales would easily remember the folktale because of the entertaining delivery. For instance, in *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*, the folktale “Gudo naTuro”, the story is about friendship in which one of the friends (Turo) is cunning. Besides learning about Baboon (Gudo) and Hare (Turo) and their nature as animals, the listeners would also relate that to humans and their behaviour and relationships.

Most folktales involved the storyteller and the listener from the introduction to the conclusion. In the folktales, the listeners actively participated in the folktales through two ways. In some folktales, the listeners were expected to repeat a phrase in agreement with the storyteller’s narration. For example in the tale of “Gudo naTuro”, the listeners would repeat “*dzepfunde*” after every phrase said by the *sarungano*. *Dzepfunde* simply means “to go on”. In some folktales the listeners participated through singing. The *sarungano* would introduce a song and the audience were expected to join and sing along; in most cases, singing was accompanied by dancing. A typical example is found in the tale entitled “Vasikana nevakomana shumba” in which the following was sung:

Bhaa, tundu

Toita musere musere toenda kwedu

Tundu,

Toita musere musere toenda kwedu.

Discussion

Language Preservation

Shona folktales, as shown in the selected cases from *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*, are an ideal way of teaching the language to children. By so doing, the young ones are not only entertained but are also taught new words. Similar views are expressed by Canonici (1995:21) and Hodza (1983:7; 1987:7). The new words are also preserved together with the folktale as it remains in the memory of the storyteller and the audience. The evolution of an indigenous language may, therefore, not threaten the loss of some words, names, and their meanings since they are preserved in the *ngano*. As examples, in today's Shona the younger generation may not use words and phrases such as *Mariga* (*Mwari*), *nhanga* (girls' bedroom), *kukuhwa moto* (lighting a fire). The use of such words and phrases in folktales, therefore, preserves them.

Idioms and Proverbs

As observed in earlier literature (Hodza 1983:7; Canonici 1995:21), the richness of a language is easier revealed by the use of proverbs, idioms and riddles. All these are used to convey some particular message and in most cases it relates to a specific locality. The aspect of *specificity* must be emphasised as it points back to the definition and descriptions of indigenous knowledge provided by Owiny, Mehta and Maretzki (2014:234) and Boven and Morohashi (2002:12) where they put emphasis of the fact the indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society. *Ngano* also use idioms and proverbs to convey messages. Reading from *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*, there are expressions such as:

1. "Mariga akombora" (*God has blessed us*)
2. "Kakova kaMusinzwi kadira muna Taisireva" (*disobedience has led to regret for something earlier warned against*)

The first statement is full of wisdom. Although the boys who turn into lions were once thankful to God for blessing them with beautiful girls, the point being driven home by the storyteller is that it is God who blesses and not men so humankind ought to seek blessings from Him. Similarly, the second phrase is a reminder to the listener that when advice is being given, the listener should take heed to avoid regret. The phrase also reminds the listener of the fundamental essence of the story: people ought to get married to those whose background they are aware of to avoid the girls' dilemma that led to regret.

Song and Dance

Singing and dancing are very important in the Shona society. This is why song and dance are part of the Shona folktales. Shoniwa (2013) shares similar sentiments in his study. By including songs in the folktales, the storyteller wisely teach the audience how to sing and dance; in most cases the tunes and dances would fuse with the local culture's genres and dance styles. In some cases, there would be an inclusion of musical instruments. In this regard, storytelling is not just a simple task but a multifaceted one. The songs also carry within them messages for both the singer and the listener.

Culture, Religion Norms and Practices

The fact that concepts about religious and socio-cultural practices are found in Shona folktales adds to their value. The findings of this study concur with assertions made by Shoniwa (2013), Turner (1992:60) and Canonici (1995:16) that folktales reveal more about people's culture, religion and social practices. Shona folktales, as revealed in *Ngano dzamatambidzanwa*, actively emphasise, while at the same time acting as storehouses of indigenous knowledge, that people should be hospitable (*kugamuchira vaeni*), that a mediator (*sadombo/munyai*) is required when paying lobola, a newly married young man should pay a courtesy call to the in-laws for customary introductions (*kutsvaira dota*), and that jokes and pleasantries (*kutukana utukwa/chizukuru*) is reserved for uncles and aunts with their nephews and nieces.

Ngano and Indigenous Knowledge Preservation

It is important to note that folktales were an outdoor activity involving groups of children (Canonici 1995:17). Knowledge was easily cascaded to many people instantaneously. Since the *sarungano* would recite a folktale to listeners as many times as he could and as many times as the listeners requested, memorisation became quite easy. The listeners' memories became the storehouses of indigenous knowledge embedded in the folktales as suggested by Matsika (2013) and Canonici (1995:14,18,19). The instances when the listeners were asked by the *sarungano* to recite a folktale they had heard at an earlier sitting was an excellent way of preserving the folktales and consequently the indigenous knowledge they possessed. This recitation was, however, flexible allowing the reciter to bring in their own personality into the story through the words used, emotion or tone of voice creating a close variation of the original. This taught other skills such as communication skills and creativity among others. Thinking skills were taught in that the children would usually be expected to deduce the moral of the story and this was tested by some discussions which would usually conclude the story.

As observed by Turner (1992), Canonici (1995) and Hodza (1983:8) that folktales were an entertaining way of giving advice to young ones, the same is realised in Shona folktales in which the fascinating use of animals instead of human beings entertained but also provided advice to the audience. Children listening to the folktale learned the name of places, objects, wild animals and insects and would easily remember the folktale because of the entertaining manner in which they were delivered. Most importantly, there was a lesson derived out of all that.

Conclusion

It is imperative to stress that Shona folktales are a good vehicle for the preservation of indigenous knowledge relating to the Shona language: words, among them, names of places, objects, animals, time together with idioms and proverbs are preserved in a manner that is entertaining but also portrays their meanings. Sociocultural norms and practices, coupled with song and dance, are also embedded in the indigenous knowledge preserved by Shona folktales. It is therefore imperative to ensure that all known Shona folktales are collected and published.

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